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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

**THE WEIGHT OF WORDS:
DISCOURSE, POWER, AND THE 19TH CENTURY PROSTITUTE**

SUBMITTED TO
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AND
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BY
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FOR
SENIOR THESIS
(FALL/SPRING 2011)
(APRIL 25, 2011)

Table of Contents

PART I: Discourse and the 19th century Prostitute

<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Chapter 1: The Great Social Evil</i>	14
Patrick Colquhoun and <i>A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis</i>	25
Parent Duchâtelet and <i>De la Prostitution</i>	30
Henry Mayhew and <i>London Labour and the London Poor</i>	41

PART II: Regulation and the 19th century Prostitute

<i>Chapter 2 : Order and Control</i>	60
Regulation and le Bureau des Mœurs	66
A Modern Mechanism of Discipline	82
<i>Chapter 3: “From Dirt Comes Death”: Regulation and the Medical Profession</i>	89
The Contagious Disease Acts	93
<i>Conclusion</i>	105
<i>Bibliography</i>	114

PART I

DISCOURSE AND THE 19TH CENTURY PROSTITUTE

INTRODUCTION

“Maintenant, je demande à tout être tant soit peu intelligent, si, dans l’intérêt des générations présents et futures, il est utile ou non d’étudier et observer les prostituées....Quant à moi, qui crois voir les choses sous leur véritable aspect et qui sais que la considération attachée aux travaux, n’est pas toujours proportionné aux services qu’ils rendent, ni aux difficultés qu’ils peuvent offrir, je m’en remets au jugement des hommes sensés qui voient et apprécient les intentions, et tout en respectant les préjuges des autres, je déplore leur aveuglement. ” Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, *La Prostitution à Paris au XIXe siècle*, 1836 ¹

“Society has suffered enough from that spurious modesty which lets fearful forms of vice swell to a rank of luxuriance rather than hint at their existence—which coyly turns away its head from the ‘wounds and putrefying sores’ that are eating into our system, because it would have to blush at the exposure.” “A Short Account of the London Magdalene Hospital, 1846” ²

Dismissing the stigma attached to this delicate subject, a social scientist alerts readers of his investigative study to the necessity of examining the prostitute from an objective perspective; a leading periodical comments upon society’s reluctance to discuss social ills for fear that “the frightening countenance of vice would leer its hoary head”—irrevocably maligning public virtue.³ The language of these discourses blend together to portray the nineteenth-century audience whom they address as one that experienced anxiety and uncertainty over the discussion of sex and sexuality. Indeed, the moral climate of nineteenth-century England and France was one that construed sexuality as problematic in regards to the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable sexuality, as well as how it should be controlled. The passages implicate that consideration of these topics had been neglected, and as a result, the issues they raised had never been resolved, but instead had grown more pressing with time. However both authors challenge

¹ Parent-Duchâtelet, Alexandre. *La Prostitution à Paris au XIXe siècle : Texte présenté et annoté par Alain Corbin*. (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1981), 60

² “A Short Account of the London Magdalene Hospital. *Quarterly Review* 83 (1846) :359-378

³ “A Short Account of the London Magdalene Hospital”

this circumstance—urging their readers to no longer turn away from such matters. They imply that society could no longer profess blindness when faced with unpleasant social problems such as corners, lurks about in the clouds in the night, gets transported or hanged, lives miserably on gin, and dies in the hospitals or workhouses of London.”⁴ Out of sight, out of mind, vice would not disappear but would spread its harmful influence among the urban populace.

These opinions represent a particular moment in nineteenth-century British and French urban history when the desire to seek out, define, and regulate what had once been hidden or ignored motivated a mass of publications surrounding sexuality and deviance. Early twentieth century historical studies on the nineteenth-century as well as popular media representations however promote an understanding of this century as one characterized by frigidity and repression of all things sexual. Richard Sennett wrote in 1974 that, “The terms of eroticism among the 19th century bourgeoisie were almost entirely couched in fear, and therefore expressed through the filter of repression.”⁵ This view of a society suffering from sexual repression is but a misunderstanding of the way in which sexuality was constructed and employed by Victorians. Michel Foucault’s theories concerning sex and power that emerged during the late twentieth-century challenged this myth of a repressive Victorian culture. The Victorians as represented by Foucault are not the emotionally frigid individuals who fear sex and its discussion. While there were increased efforts to limit the visibility of sex, the Victorians did not deny its meanings or neglect its discussion. On the contrary, sex and sexuality were matters of significant interest to Victorians whose consideration of sexuality through the pages of contemporary literature signaled that sex had adopted a distinctive appearance in the public sphere as the focal point of authoritative discourses. This study as will become evident, owes much to Foucaultian insight

⁴ Murray, John Fisher. *The World of London, in Two Volumes*. (London: Richard Bentley, 1845), 68

⁵ Sennett, Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. (London: Cox & Wyndham, Ltd, 1974), 9

concerning the significance and function of discourses on sexuality. Making a connection between power, knowledge, and the construction of sexuality, Foucault argued that such discourses were part of the exercise of power relations during the nineteenth century.

The mass of information available during this period was not the manifestation of a culture that denied all forms of sexual expression, but rather the sign of one preoccupied by its meanings and possibilities. Nineteenth century discourse did not shy away from sexual discussion—medical journals warned against the dangers of masturbation; sensationalist novels shocked readers with stories of women who had given in to their passions and suffered the consequences; articles in newspapers commented on the promiscuity of the lower-classes. As one physician noted, never before had so much information emerged regarding this subject, “The most careless observer of the public journals cannot but be struck at the weekly details bearing on the topic in hand, which start into upper air, and cause remark in every circle.”⁶

It is only towards the middle of the century, however, that we see a dramatic increase in discourses on sex. Furthermore, the majority concerned themselves with distinctions between proper versus improper sexual behavior, and the discussion of individuals who transgressed gender norms. Why was this particular historical moment conducive to the discussion of sexual deviance? An understanding of what induced this change and compelled writers to contemplate these issues can only arise through a historical consideration of nineteenth century social, economic, and cultural shifts. An age of transformation, the nineteenth century was characterized by developments such as the rise of industrial capitalism, the growth of the middle class, a changing family structure, and transitioning gender roles. During this period, the city took on

⁶ Acton, William. “Prostitution considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and other large cities; with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils.” *Leader: A Political and Literary Review* 9.415 (1858): 240

new meanings for members of the middle-class who financially and socially benefited the most from the technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution. Household incomes increased due to the new professions and job openings incited by urbanization and industrialization. Now more than ever, cities had need of engineers, factory managers, store managers, and it was the middle-class that supplied this demand. As a status group that had only recently achieved such a foothold in society, the middle-class created a distinct social identity in order to better differentiate themselves from those of lower rank. Theirs was a culture of performance where status was the ultimate propellant. Fear of downward social mobility, which among the middle-class could be inflicted by failure to comply with established etiquette codes, resulted in adherence to rigid social conventions. Those who failed to comply with these codes faced discrimination, as by mid-century, the conservative attitudes and values cherished by members of the bourgeoisie had left the boundaries of the private home and entered the public domain—ultimately defining the moral climate of nineteenth-century England and France.

Victorian ideology essentially created an image of an immoral public sphere that was in clear contrast to the idealized dream world of domestic happiness cherished by middle-class families. Within this newly created model of public space, bourgeois identities were validated and reinforced and consequently public space became an extension of private middle class values. Mona Domosh's *Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World* uses modern feminist theory to explain how the spatial subdivisions of the new nineteenth-century city were shaped by the prevailing gender and social norms—an occurrence which influenced acceptable roles and behaviors men and women could perform in the public spaces of London and Paris. Domosh claims that the new forms of femininity that arose in the 1850s challenged the Victorian belief that as “angels of the hearth” who contributed to the moral health of their home,

women had no place on city streets. Distinguished by the geography of its public spaces and the interactions which take place on its streets, the city, as Domosh defines it, is essentially masculine. The modern city as conceived by nineteenth century engineers and architects was the embodiment of order, “an expression of the human intellect’s dominance over nature.”⁷ The opposite of a rational, male order—femininity was symbolic of disorder and chaos. In light of these gender constructs, the presence of women in the public sphere was problematic to a society that emphasized the role she within the private sphere.

As the century progressed, the creation of shopping districts such as Cheapside in London’s West End posed a problem to the strict distinctions between public and private that bourgeois ideology attempted to maintain. As stated by Domosh, ““When the "wrong" bodies are in the "wrong" places--when women walk into male spaces or vice versa-- this is often translated as a challenge to norms of feminine or masculine behavior . Because shopping could be depicted as a disruptive chaotic activity, where male retailers could be exhausted by an insatiable female desire to see without buying, women were continually viewed as powerful agents, capable of subverting the retail scene.”⁸ A potentially disruptive force that threatened the stability of society, the presence of women who strayed into the rational, male public sphere was governed by etiquette whose aim was to ensure that the behavior of such women conformed to established gender norms. Within these parameters, behavior such as walking unaccompanied on the street was the mark of a transgressive sexuality.

Such ideas concerning gender roles, sexuality, and public space provide a basis for understanding the anxiety of writers over a particular individual—the prostitute who

⁷ Domosh, 71

⁸ *Ibid*

transgressed all gender norms and rules regarding appropriate female behavior in the public sphere. Condemned by moral commentators and defined in terms of her sexual deviance, the prostitute was an example of a figure whose mere existence jeopardized social stability and public health—concerns that fuelled an increase in literature on her dangerous attributes. A survey of nineteenth century newspapers supplies numerous examples of prostitutes who ambush men, lure them into darkened alleyways to steal their possessions, or even bind customers as they sleep and make off with their belongings.⁹ Although prostitution had long been a public concern, it wasn't until the mid-nineteenth century that it became a target for widespread inquiry. As exemplified by bourgeois ideology separating the public and private spheres and attempts to codify acceptable female behavior on city streets, the control of women's movement had long been a subject for concern. However, in regards to the prostitute debates surrounding this matter became even more heated as the century progressed. A moral and physical danger to men, the prostitute was the embodiment of the disorderly, chaotic elements attributed to the feminine sex. No other woman posed such a threat to society's well-being as conveyed by this discourse's depiction:

“Woman, waylaid, tempted, deceived, becomes in turn the terrible avenger of her sex. Armed with a power which is all but irresistible, and stripped of that which can alone restrain and purify her influence, she steps upon the arena of life qualified to act her part in the reorganization of society...Society has made her what she is, and must now be governed by her potent influence. The weight of this influence is untold; view it in the dissolution of domestic ties, in the sacrifice of family peace, in the cold desolation of homes.”¹⁰

This portrayal of the unsettling repercussions that stem from woman's disorderly nature and the prostitute's sinister power belongs to the larger rhetoric of male mastery that validated

⁹ See articles in *The Times*, “Guildhall- Mary Sloat, one of the prostitutes...” 7 February 1823, 3, “On Wednesday evening, one of the common prostitutes...” September 28, 1827, 3.; and “Queen Square- Charlotte Webb...” Oct 1, 1833, 4

¹⁰ Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*, 330

the patriarchal structure of Victorian society. Considering the viewpoint expressed by this emphatic commentator, discourses on feminine sexuality can thus be seen as a means to elicit the subjugation of aberrant women--a circumstance that aligns with Foucault's assertion that discourse on sexuality was part of society's quest for control over the individual, a means of extending control over one's personal and intimate life.¹¹ During the nineteenth century, the enforced regulation of prostitution was advocated by moral commentators, social scientists, and physicians who used their discourse to provoke efforts that would discipline the prostitute. To quote Alain Corbin's study on French prostitutes and their regulation, "In no other area do we see more clearly, how at their birth the social sciences were bound up with the authorities' concern with supervision and punishment."¹² Corbin's work has been an instrumental to my own research on this subject and I have used his research as a foundation for my own investigation.

Through the examination of authoritative discourses surrounding prostitution, this study explores how the production and presentation of knowledge functions as an exercise of power through three closely related, interwoven themes: the reigning moral code, gender ideology, and sexual norms that governed interactions between the sexes in nineteenth century urban cities; sexuality within the public domain and attempts to control its manifestations; and how publications about prostitutes led to negative consequences for other individuals who failed to conform to definitions of normality. Considered from a Foucaultian standpoint, the social and moral climate of mid-nineteenth century Paris and London was not one that negated the role and meaning of sex, but rather one that encouraged its redefinition amid the pages of contemporary literature. Authoritative discourses on the prostitute in the form of books, social investigations,

¹¹ Copley, 26

¹² Corbin, Alain. *Women for Hire*. 16

and the opinions of medical experts acted as an exercise of power that for their middle-class audiences had powerful sway over construction of the prostitute's sexual identity; comprehension of her deviant sexuality; and the mechanisms that should be implemented to ensure her social control. The compendium of knowledge collected and presented by these texts invariably fashioned a portrait of the prostitute that exemplified how power operates through the production of knowledge.

Discourses are invariably a product of their times as exemplified by writers desire to respond to what was considered to be a pressing social issue. Did discourses provide their nineteenth-century audience with social cues on how to act towards prostitutes? How did they attempt to control deviant sexuality? What mechanisms of power did they exercise and how? How do these books influence how sex was thought of and prompt government action? How did the regulatory system and doctors have power over the comprehension of sexual and gender identities? The issues which are raised through these questions are complex and bear important implications for the analysis of culture in both the historical past and the present. It is important to establish at this point, therefore, a general theoretical framework for this study before going on to consider particular historical moments.

Before tracing the evolution of discourses on prostitution as seen through publications by Patrick Colquhoun, Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, and Henry Mayhew this investigation will first discuss the social, cultural and economic conditions that shaped literature around prostitution in the nineteenth century. Discourses propagated images of the prostitute, influenced public opinion, and through the body of knowledge they constituted, incited movements for her control and regulation-- efforts that came to fruition in nineteenth century France and mid-nineteenth century England under the guise of regulation and the passage of the Contagious Disease Acts.

Chapter 2 will examine the nature of regulation in France and its function as a modern-day representation of Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*. Chapter 3 will explore the forms taken in England to regulate prostitution and how the medical community influenced public opinion regarding the prostitute and disease. My study will thus investigate the nature of power relations in the nineteenth century and the part that discursive constructions of deviant sexuality played in this historical process.

Within their narratives, the authors of authoritative discourses on prostitution formulated the historical, social, and moral identity of the prostitute. However, the works discussed in this study cannot be taken as accurate portrayals of the prostitute's experience. These were publications aimed specifically at an uncertain middle and upper-class public. Accurate representations of the prostitute would not achieve the desired effect; they would not notify the audience of the forms her deviant sexuality assumed, the dangers she posed to moral and physical health, and why this individual presented such a threat.

Over the course of the century, discourses on prostitutes and other deviant members of society saw a transition from a primarily moral stance to one that was more scientific in its approach. As such, they constituted a form of knowledge that was more "veritable" than content that merely spoke of immoral behavior from a religious standpoint. This was knowledge gained from systematic study rather than religious doctrine. The studies of the experts discussed in this work were thus more believable to an audience who had before them statistics, charts, and tables validating cultural definitions and stereotypes on this issue.¹³ Social investigations, surveys, and medical discourses that implemented the science of moral statistics constituted a body of knowledge which provided empirical support for the subjugation of deviant populations.

¹³ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 104

Authorities writing about sexuality used the power of their pen to make people act, shaping them to believe that the social control of prostitution was necessary for the sake of public welfare. The discursive literature on prostitution that appeared during this century thus provides an indication of how power manifests itself in unseen ways and how the power of words can shape definitions of sexuality and deviance.

The history of discourses on sexuality as embodied by those discussing the prostitute is important to the understanding of modern sexual behavior. Nineteenth century authoritative discourses provide modern-day readers with a glimpse into how sexuality is constructed by media, as well as the forms taken to control deviations from sexual norms. Discourses provide a way of understanding the pressure that marginalized social groups such as homosexuals and minorities experience to conform to prevailing definitions of normality. By looking at particular uses of these discourses to justify the social control of deviant populations, we can see how they relate not only to constructions of sex and appropriate behavior, but to the exercise of power over deviant social groups—an example of how power may operate when its manifestations appear insignificant and inconsequential. The anxiety surrounding prostitution seems to crystallize many contemporary socio-cultural concerns and conflicts surrounding deviant sexuality, and the danger it poses to public welfare. Through the reconstitution of opinions regarding prostitution and how they were challenged or upheld by authoritative discourses on sexuality, we can better understand how the cultural dynamics of western society induces psychological conflicts regarding sexual identity and autonomy

Chapter 1

THE GREAT SOCIAL EVIL

“Do you ever go East, good Reader? Something is to be learnt by doing so,--the miserable nature of the large mass of constructions around the metropolis, the wretched conditions under which many fellow-creatures dwell, and the undesirability of offering much obstruction to the proposed clearing away of such places by railway companies and others....From the Docks come large covered vans, heavily laden with all descriptions of merchandise, the produce of every part of the world; while railway-vans, coal-wagons, the carts of the country carriers, carriages for the well-to-do, omnibuses, cabs, and other conveyances, form a struggling mass, seemingly inextricable. In all directions, far as the eye can reach, the footpaths too are thronged with countless wayfarers.”

George Godwin, *Another Blow for Life* (1864)¹⁴

In a state of continuous flux and change, there are parts of the modern city that remain unknown to its residents. The rapid expansion of nineteenth century cities elicited a mass of urban literature that strove to guide readers through the waxing geographical and social environment of modern London and Paris. The image of industrialized London as portrayed by Goodwin’s description above is one reiterated throughout the course of the nineteenth century. A survey of sentiments expressed in popular media paints a portrait of a population apprehensive and unsettled by the constantly changing surface and teeming crowds of a city whose cacophony of sounds, sights, and smells overwhelmed the senses. As labor of construction projects altered the surface of the modern city daily, there was an intensified desire to possess knowledge of her dark corners, her marginal residents, and the very nature of her existence. This chapter will discuss discourses that sought to document the social realities affecting urban populations in London and Paris. Authors of such works served as guardians of the past whose printed words granted immortality to landmarks and people whose presence felt jeopardized by “the city’s

¹⁴ Godwin, George. *Another Blow for Life*. (London: WM. H. Allen & Co, 1864), accessed April 21, 2011, 1

insatiable appetite.”¹⁵ Houses were demolished; neighborhoods disappeared to make way for new projects; entire families died in the wake of disease epidemics. Such incidents showed that what existed there one day, could be gone another. Amid the pages of nineteenth century discourses, however, the places and individuals who disappeared from living memory could be preserved for the sake of posterity. Their description constituted a body of information that conveyed knowledge used in the prevention of disease, resolution of social problems, and design of proposed sites...

The discourses of this period not only recorded the city’s history but also addressed anxieties that accompanied the growth of London and Paris—offering advice on how to navigate unfamiliar terrain of the modern metropolis and ambiguous social situations. The amount of knowledge furnished by prescriptive and authoritative literature of the period imparted readers with information needed to “heal the foulest blots of the metropolis” and “restore society to a more healthy and vigorous condition.”¹⁶ This chapter’s aim is to explore the trajectory of discourses surrounding an urban issue particularly problematic to writers of the period—the increasing visibility of deviant sexuality as embodied by the nineteenth century prostitute. The three studies discussed in this chapter attempted to record and prescribe solutions to the dilemma prostitution posed. The coexistence of divergent or contradictory representations of the prostitute in these discourses, which married conservative morals with the thorough methodology of sciences, underlined the difficulty one faced in separating prostitutes from respectable women. In their portrayal of the prostitute and the evil she represented, how did such discourses influence ideas regarding deviant sexuality? By the chapter’s end, I hope to have illustrated how nineteenth

¹⁵ Wilson, Elizabeth. *The Sphinx in the City: Urban life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*. (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1991), 5

¹⁶ Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*. Vol. 4. Reprint. (London :August M. Kelley, 1967), 197

century discourses written by experts influenced the perception of prostitutes and how their classification of marginalized individuals functioned as a form of power—training readers to view the prostitute as a deviant figure whose threat to public welfare necessitated social control.

As Lynda Nead discusses extensively in *Victorian Babylon*, London in the nineteenth century underwent a process of modernization at a rate that alarmed its variegated population. A resident of the early 1800s would not have recognized the subterranean tunnels, tangle of railway tracks, and gas-lit shopping districts, which became common features of urban life sixty years later. London's borders swelled as her population ballooned. By 1700, she was already recognized as the world's greatest port and commercial center with a population of over 600,000;¹⁷ by the end of the century this number had risen to over a million.¹⁸ Throughout the 1800s, London grew faster than any other city in Europe. Between 1800 and 1810, the population rose by 23% and according to the official census, by 1871 it had reached 2,254,260.¹⁹ Many felt that the city and her population had grown too vast to manage efficiently. One writer's description gives an indication of just how marvelous yet frightening London's growth appeared: "The rapid increase of the population, manufactures, and commerce of Great Britain is the world's wonder. Each week the difficulty at London Bridge will increase; and without very speedy measures, a main artery closely connected with the heart of London will become congested, causing even greater loss and inconvenience than are now felt."²⁰ Fed by a steady stream of immigrants, London's rapid population increase led to overcrowded lodgings and streets that restricted the mobility of inhabitants. She had evolved into "an immense openmouthed body, consuming

¹⁷ "A Population History of London ." The Proceedings of the Old Bailey- London's Central Criminal Court, 1674-1913. *Old Bailey Online*, n.d. Web. 3 Apr. 2011. <oldbaileyonline.org/static/population-history-of-london-.jsp>

¹⁸ IBID

¹⁹ Sheppard, Francis. London, 1808-1870: The Infernal Wen. London, 1971. 6

²⁰ Godwin, Another Blow for Life, 2

everything that comes within its grasp.”²¹ One columnist in the London Times likened the city to an obese man who has fallen ill to the sin of gluttony and who may at any moment die from a fatty degeneration of the heart.²²

Londoners indeed felt a sense of despair at what they considered to be a grotesquely growing and disease ridden city. Narrow streets crowded with pedestrians and peddlers made traffic circulation difficult; stench from overflowing cesspools—some of which had not been cleaned in nine months—assailed the nostrils of citizens, poisoning the air and polluting the dwellings of the poor.²³ When they finally cleaned, the refuse of cesspools sometimes emptied into the Thames, which, along with rotten food scraps, the sewage of industrial pollution, and other waste items produced by a city with over a million residents, led to what was later called “the Great Stink” of 1858. The summer of that year bore witness to an overbearing heat wave, which created the foulest smelling fumes that Londoners had ever known. In 1855, scientist Michael Faraday wrote to the editor of *The Times* warning of the catastrophe bound to happen, noting that “the whole of the river was an opaque pale brown fluid and “near the bridges the feculence rolled up in clouds so dense that they were visible at the surface.”²⁴ For readers of this admonition, the foul-smelling fumes that caused the air to rank of putrefying shit would have been especially troubling given that popular belief attributed the transmission of contagious diseases to miasmas—noxious exhalations from sewage that polluted the atmosphere. Miasma theory stressed the possibility of catching an illness merely by breathing in polluted air.²⁵

George Goodwin’s endeavor to incite sanitary reform describes the horror one family faced as a

²¹ Nead, Lynda. *Victorian Babylon*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 15

²² Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, 15

²³ “Sanitary Street Ablutions.” *The Times*. July 14, 1846, 8

²⁴ Reprinted in Bence Jones and Micheal Faraday’s *The Life and Letters of Faraday: in two volumes*. 2. ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1870) 363

²⁵ Found in, “Sanitary Regulations in the City” *The Times*. (July 9, 1847), 32

result of these miasmic fumes: “Within five weeks, five children of one family have all perished from exactly the same disorder as that attributed on a previous inquiry, “a poisoning of the blood,” through the impurity of the air, the bad water supply, and other defective sanitary conditions.”²⁶

Surmounting physical boundaries, the miasma not only affected one’s physical health, but also endangered one’s moral well-being. According to medical and social commentators, in addition to “debility, continued fever, and death,” London’s want of pure air also meant “widowhood, orphanage, pauperism, and money lost to the living.” Writers frequently cited the debilitating environment of lower-class neighborhoods as reasons for the poor’s high mortality rate and immoral behavior. The contaminated water closets, poorly constructed lodgings with thin-porous walls that induced fatal fevers, and dingy, ill-lit nurseries whose insalubrious atmosphere poisoned infants all signified to a concerned public that thousands of Londoners were condemned to exist in a metropolis where cleanliness was impossible, health and morals were speedily degraded; and where children were educated downwards into criminals.²⁷ The consequence of living in such a deleterious environment meant thousands succumbed to disease per year. An article in the 1850 edition of *The Times* painted death as a salient feature of city life:

“The sanitary condition of London at this moment is such, that one half of the deaths produced by a certain class of diseases can be attributed, without any room for doubt, to the want of the commonest appliances of health. The average weekly number of these deaths is about 250. By the visitation of the cholera London lost 16,000 of its inhabitants, 8,000 of whom, it is computed on the same evidence which determines all other proceedings of every-day life, might have been saved by attention to the precautions

²⁶ Godwin, 32

²⁷ Godwin, 32

which it is now sought to enforce. We will not presume any such indifference to human life as would be shown by an apathetic acquiescence in a state of things like this.”²⁸

Although his description seems to be an example of hyperbole, the unnamed columnist’s metaphor comparing London to an obese man ready to die from fatty generation of the heart did express a valid fear—disease and death were clearly potent realities that Londoners faced as a result of the city’s health crisis. In the first half of the century, multiple outbreaks of cholera assailed the population—killing 1,500 in 1831; 14,000 in 1848; and another 6,000 in 1866.²⁹ The cholera outbreaks were in part a consequence of the city’s fragmented network of drainage pipes and cesspools—an issue that officials addressed by replacing them with a centralized sewer system. The chaotic environment generated by the demolition and creation of sewage systems was made even more unpleasant by the construction of new railway lines linking London with the outlying suburban areas. From beneath, city streets were uprooted and overturned to build a newfangled underground railway. Entire neighborhoods, shops, houses, parks, and even cemeteries were demolished and turned into ugly excavation sites that sent up a perpetual cloud of dirt and dust. Streets vanished, to be replaced by new ones that better represented the image of a thoroughly modern nation. These vast public works projects that aimed to restructure the city above and below were all motivated by the desire to improve, to heal what was considered London’s ills: poor circulation, disease, and immorality.

The population growth and remapping of the city accompanied by other urban transformations aggravated social problems that gave rise to anxiety among members of the

²⁸ “Sanitary Conditions of London.” London Times. Feb 8, 1850, accessed April 4, 2011. http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/exist/cocoon/london/monuments_all.xq?id=times/1times50.208

²⁹ Brown, Robert. "London in the Nineteenth Century." *The University of North Carolina at Pembroke*. Accessed April 22, 2011. http://www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/london_19c.html. Brown draws his statistics from estimates that appear in several nineteenth century surveys

professional classes, social investigators, and government officials. Early nineteenth century Londoners not only witnessed the technological advancements of the Industrial Revolution, but also the loss of social heterogeneity and growth of slums that modernization precipitated. While the upper-classes reaped the benefits of strengthened industry and new technologies, the lower orders-- already handicapped by their lack of capital and humble background—were victims of the London’s topographic transformation. How much did these urban renovations affect working-class individuals? Many railway excavation sites had been built on land where slums had previously stood, creating further overcrowding in poor neighborhoods in the case of St. Pancras, one of London’s oldest cemeteries was overturned to make way for a train line. Concerned commentators such as Godwin asked that some enactment should be made to lead railway companies and others to provide accommodation for those who were displaced. While the population of the City parishes had remained stationary, the number of houses since 1801 had not increased, but actually diminished by 3,000; and therefore, the same population which inhabited 17,000 houses in 1801, were crowded into 14,000 houses in 1851.³⁰ In light of such facts, it was clear that modernization came at a high price and the burden was not equally distributed among all members of society.

Unlike the case in Paris, where the poorer classes were pushed outward to decrepit *banlieues*, in London those who could afford to do so migrated outward to avoid the commotion caused by urban improvements. Termed the “suburban exodus,” this migration pattern left the inner city peopled by members of the laboring classes who worked in industries such as foodstuffs, building material, and soap.³¹ Conservative subscribers to miasmic theory believed that the miserable conditions of working-class districts sickened the healthy and that living in

³⁰ Godwin, 31

³¹ http://www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/london_19c.html

close proximity with such impure individuals would lead to moral contagion as well. Distrusted by the upper classes as immoral and untrustworthy thanks to their lifestyle at odds with the reigning Victorian morality, members of the lower classes were regarded as the scourge that contributed to London's ill-health. In the eyes of nineteenth century commentators, London had become a sick city where "life is shortened, health is depreciated, happiness prevented, manners are degraded, crime and sorrow increased, and evils lie hidden around on every side."³² Such reactions were prototypical of the middle and upper-classes who saw the city as veering down a path that led to perdition. One columnist in the *Morning Post* blamed "the prevalence of disease and precocity of vice among the lower classes" for London's sanitary and moral predicaments.³³

The expansion of nineteenth century cities paralleled an increase in literature written about urban life. Treatises on the "urban problem" and "the frightful condition of parts of the metropolis" abounded, using infection and sickness as the prevalent metaphors to describe urban life while lamenting the crimes made possible because of the new social configurations of the city.³⁴ This pessimistic attitude towards London's social climate was echoed by Thomas Carlyle who wrote in his 1829 commentary on British society, "That great outward changes are in progress can be doubtful to no one. The time is sick and out of joint. Many things have reached their height; and it is a wise adage that tells us, the darkest hour is nearest the dawn."³⁵

And no authors expressed such dark warnings as the emerging experts on sexual behavior, criminality, and social degeneration. The metaphor of disease and infection was most powerfully expressed in literature regarding sexuality and the lower classes: those undesirables

³² Godwin, viii

³³ Article in *The Morning Post*. Reprinted in Godwin's *Another Blow for Life*. (London: W H. Allen & Co, 1864) 3

³⁴ Godwin, *Another Blow for Life*., George. 4

³⁵ Carlyle, Thomas. "Signs of the Times" *The Collected Works of Thomas Carlyle*. 16 volumes. (London Chapman and Hall, 1858) Accessed March 10, 2011.

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/carlyle/signs1.html>

whom genteel women pretended not to notice on city streets—the ill-clothed hags who lurked around dark corners, the women with flashing, bold eyes who left their heads uncovered and slyly lifted their skirts, entrancing passers-by with their slim ankles.³⁶ It was such wanton society that horrified social scientists, moralists, and politicians worried would infect Britain's standards and hinder the progression of human civilization. If such promiscuity and criminality could flourish, society would revert back to a primitive state and resemble the barbaric African tribes where chastity and virtue were devalued rather than leaders of the modern world.

During the nineteenth century, an outpouring of literature concerning these issues appeared in newspapers, bookshops, and in pamphlets handed out on city streets. The Victorians had a preoccupation with cataloguing and classifying that reflected their society's emphasis on order. Authors especially chose to rail against the evils of public obscenity in books, amassing impressive collections of interviews and statistics to support their arguments. Despite their common views concerning the problem of public sexuality and contagion, these various authorities did not agree in their casual arguments or remedies. We can identify three main schools of thought here: those which concerned themselves with economic and social causes, those which considered the issue from a scientific approach, and philosophical works, those which in the stringent climate of Victorian Britain was grounded in evangelical doctrine. The miscellaneous arrangement of voices crying out against the evils of public sexuality and obscenity reflects the dilemma faced by advocates of reform. What was the best method for ridding city streets of undesirables? Was this a moral issue, administrative problem, or was the answer to be found in religion?

³⁶ Colorful descriptions such as these can be found in Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, as well as popular literature of the time, notably the novels of Charles Dickens

The ambivalence over how to approach the problem of sexuality is particularly apparent in the metaphors used to describe women who sold their bodies for money on city streets. No figure encompassed fears regarding public sexuality more so than the nineteenth century prostitute—the antipode of docile femininity; a siren who threatened her customers with venereal disease, tempted young men into lives of sin, and by her very presence in the public domain, acted as a corruptive influence on respectable women.³⁷ An examination of literature on prostitutes in the nineteenth century brings up a surprising array of names: fallen women, women of the town, Bathshebas and Jezebels, soiled doves, ladies of ill-fame, ladies of easy virtue, brides of the multitude, and public women. For nineteenth century readers, the prostitute therefore assumed different identities that changed according to an author's intent and targeted audience. The euphemisms invoked by authors guided public opinion and indicated which view one should adopt concerning this ambiguous figure. Drawing upon biblical references, many authors, especially those with an evangelical leaning, tended to take a sympathetic view of prostitutes. On the other hand, those that advocated her control and regulation cast her in a negative light, highlighting her immoral qualities antithetical to bourgeois conceptions of proper femininity: "The greater part have served from very tender years a vile apprenticeship to their miserable trade....they have been brought up with scarcely an idea of modesty and personal reserve; the language to which they have habitually listened has been of the foulest and most blasphemous description. Intoxicating drink has formed the only, or almost the only pleasure of the class to which they belong."³⁸ The tone taken by this author cast the prostitute as an

³⁷ See Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, Charles Dicken's *David Copperfield*, and Colquhoun's *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* for such language

³⁸ "Midnight Meetings of Fallen Women." *Leader and Saturday Analyst* 1:527 (April 28, 1860), 397-398. Accessed March 5, 2011, <http://ncse-viewpoint.cch.kcl.ac.uk/Default.htm?href=LDR%2F1860%2F04%2F28&page=10&entityid=Ar00902&view=entity>

inherently licentious woman who reveled in her unbridled sexuality. While it was regrettable that her promiscuity was a natural consequence of her miserable social environment, she nevertheless represented a threat to respectable members of society whose virtue might be compromised by her presence on city streets.

Rather than such critical depictions, as exemplified by this writer's observation, the most common approach evoked the trope of the prostitute as victim of her circumstances: "It is too often presumed that those unhappy women who infest our streets after nightfall are for the most part victims of seduction; that they were once happy in all the surroundings of a virtuous home, and looking forward to a life of honour and usefulness. Then to carry on the tale, came the spoiler, who, under the guise of honorable affection, engaged the young and unsuspecting heart, took a base and unmanly advantage of its weakness, and then flung the gathered flower to fade on the common highway."³⁹ According to the stereotypical biography of a prostitute portrayed in such discourses, she had once been an innocent virgin led into debauchery through her seduction by an older male. Disgraced, cast off by her family, and without any valuable skills, she had no choice but to resort to the sale of her body as a means of supporting herself. In discourses which aimed to stir sympathetic readers to aid this desolate figure, the prostitute was also construed as desperately unhappy with her shameful state and only too willing to be guided back to redemption by upright members of Christian society.

³⁹ "Midnight Meetings of Fallen Women"

Patrick Colquhoun and

A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis

An investigative work preceding the vast statistical studies that would later appear in the mid-nineteenth century, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* by Patrick Colquhoun, is symptomatic of an authoritative discourse relying on a compassionate view of the prostitute. In contemplating their case along with those of other criminal individuals, its author sought to alert readers of “the growing depravity of the age” and the expansion of London’s underworld into what were once respectable neighborhoods.⁴⁰ Born in 1745 in Dunbarton and descended from an illustrious Scottish clan, Colquhoun was hailed as a model of virtue and service by his contemporaries. During his lifetime, he engaged himself in public service and was known for his business savvy, assisting on numerous commissions aimed to strengthen Scotland’s trade and industry. In 1789 he moved to London with his wife and four children, and in 1793 was appointed a Police Magistrate under The Police Act which authorized the establishment of seven public offices, with three justices to each under a parliamentary establishment. In London, Colquhoun began to focus his attention on the regulation of the state, worrying that “the peace of Society will be disturbed by the licentious clamours arising from the ill-regulated passions of vulgar life.”⁴¹ At the time, London’s police force was known for its inefficacy: incompetent officers were easily bribed, ineffective regulatory measures left pedestrians at the mercy of criminals at certain hours of the night, thieves called mudlarks plagued the shipping industry, stealing valuable cargo and property. Colquhoun’s ambitious volume of over 700 pages examined all aspects of the “Evils” existing in London and proposed reformatory and regulatory

⁴⁰ Colquhoun, Patrick. *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*. 1796. Reprint. (London: Eighteenth Century Collections Online, 1800), 334

⁴¹ Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, 335

measures that should be undertaken by the Police. First published in 1796, it was immensely popular, reprinted into six editions, translated into several languages, exported to the Americas, and consulted by the legislature where many of its principles were adopted and acted upon. Due to its popularity, Colquhoun's treatise had a large hand in shaping early nineteenth century public opinion regarding criminal society and prostitution.

As demonstrated by Colquhoun's description of prostitutes in this work, the construct of the prostitute as "a lost sheep of the flock" held a powerful sway over the social imagination of readers.⁴² "In contemplating their [prostitutes'] case, it is impossible to avoid dropping a tear of pity—many of them perhaps originally seduced from a state of innocence, while they were the joy and comfort of their unhappy parents. Many of them born and educated to expect a better fate, until deceived by falsehood and villainy, they see their error when it is too late to recede."⁴³ Such depictions spoke to the cultural imagery of the dangers facing young women—daughters and sisters who, without constant guidance and protection, could lose their virtue and respectability. By the mid-nineteenth century, the fallen woman was a popular figure in sensational novels and conduct literature where she functioned as a cautionary warning to young girls who might be tempted to accede to the seemingly benign wishes of a suitor.

Calquhoun's own estimates however contradict this conception of a prostitute's beginning. Most prostitutes were not born and educated to expect a better fate. Only 2,000 out of the estimated 80,000 prostitutes in London were classified as educated.⁴⁴ For the majority—women of the laboring classes—prostitution was a profession no different than any other form of menial labor. Colquhoun's opinion regarding these women, however, is colored by the attitudes

⁴² Colquhoun, 332

⁴³ Colquhoun, 334

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

of his social class. While the fallen woman experiences poignant feelings of distress peculiar to women who have moved in a high sphere and who have been better educated, the working class woman chooses her profession from inclination—a depiction grounded in bourgeois stereotypes that cast working class prostitutes possess loser morals than middle and upper class “angels of the hearth” due to their increased exposure to the immorality of the public domain. Such women corrupt the morals of youth, enticing them into a sinful life of debauchery.

Although he professes that all prostitutes are objects of compassion, Colquhoun’s attitude concerning this subject matter cannot be divorced from the biases of his social class; the views espoused in his work betray more sympathy for the prostitute’s fall from grace rather than the harsh reality of such a life. Nevertheless, despite this tendency, Colquhoun must be commended for portraying a less stereotypical view of the prostitute. *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* provides two contradictory images of prostitutes—those “compelled of necessity [by dint of their seduction] to mingle with the abandoned herd, who have long been practiced in the walk of infamy, until they too become speedily polluted and depraved⁴⁵—and those who originated from “the great mass...mostly women who have been in a state of menial servitude, and of whom not a few, from the love of idleness and dress, with the misfortune of good looks, have partly from inclination, not seldom from previous seduction and loss of character, resorted to Prostitution as a livelihood.”⁴⁶ One image of the prostitute is fashioned from the sentimentalized stereotype of the fallen woman and the other, a more realistic appraisal of the prostitute as a woman who voluntarily chose her profession. The “Unhappy females who support themselves by Prostitution in this great Metropolis” may look glamorous but, according to Colquhoun, they end up wretched and miserable, dying from disease in hospitals, unlived, alone,

⁴⁵ Colquhoun, 335

⁴⁶ Colquhoun, 339

and without friends.⁴⁷ It is notable that both descriptions operate on the trope of the prostitute as a woman who cannot escape the moral infection associated with her trade. For this author, although they are of a more educated class, fallen women ultimately, debased by their profession, adopt the habits of working-class women. And while the second example grants the prostitute the possibility of choosing her profession, it casts her as a woman so vain and immoral that she would sell her body for the price of a new dress.

Although he feels that prostitution marks the growing depravity of the age, Colquhoun does not advocate its elimination, which would be near impossible due to structure of society. Given that upper and middle-upper class men usually married in their late twenties when they had accumulated enough capital to support a family comfortably, expecting them to contain their sexual desires until the night they consummated their nuptials on the marriage bed seemed unreasonable.⁴⁸ Here, we see a double standard of the age. While women were prohibited from premarital relations, lest they ruin their chances of entering society, the same condition did not apply to men. While not publicly sanctioned, it was acknowledged that men had need to whet their sexual appetites, usually through the services of prostitutes. As Calquhoun states, “[Prostitution] is an evil therefore which must be endured while human passions exist: but it is at the same time an evil which may not only be lessened, but rendered less noxious and dangerous to the peace and good order of society.”⁴⁹

Considering this circumstance, Colquhoun’s solution to this necessary evil was its regulation rather than its suppression, which experience proved worsened the problem. As he

⁴⁷ Calquhoun, 339

⁴⁸ Found in Micheal Mason’s *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*: according to an 1840 Registrar’s General report the average age of marriage for men was 24.45. (pg 50). Mason states that while there was a trend to marry younger at the beginning of the century., among the gentry and professional class the age began to rise.

⁴⁹ Colquhoun, 344

states, prostitutes who were once found on one or two streets in Westminster are now found to be in every part of London, preventing decent people from enjoying themselves. This regrettable occurrence is seen in the Tea Garden, intended to be a place of rational recreation but now avoided by modest families due to a lack of proper police regulation and increase in the number of prostitutes. Colquhoun's concern with removing prostitutes from places frequented by respectable members of society demonstrates an important principle concerning the regulation of prostitutes: out of sight and out of mind, prostitution would no longer pose a threat to Society. Nineteenth century commentators took issue with the presence of prostitutes in the public domain rather than the profession itself. In the streets, the prostitute posed a temptation to youth, made the situation of other women unsafe, and insulted public morals, trespassing the boundary that delineated public from private. Victorian sexual norms relegated the home as the domain where all things sexual took place; here, sexual intercourse was performed for its procreative function. On the contrary, in the public domain where sex was associated with vice, prostitutes were a bold reminder that sex was a pleasurable activity.

Colquhoun's avid concern with the regulation of prostitutes must be seen in the context of the post-Enlightenment obsession with control and order. Order gives life to the power of the State, enabling it to ensure the safety of its people. According to Colquhoun, the importance of the Police to the maintenance of order was key to the progress of civilization. "The police "[are] like the Mechanical power applied to a useful Machine, devoid of which it remains without motion, action or without benefit. "⁵⁰ Nurtured by Police, government, law, and order grow "to maturity and in course of time spread a luxuriant comfort and security."⁵¹ The theme of the love of order and the necessity of regulation, which appears in Colquhoun's book, also emerges in the

⁵⁰ *Ibid*

⁵¹ *Ibid*

work of several authors of the time, most notably across the Channel in Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet's monumental study of Parisian prostitutes.

Parent-Duchâtelet and *De la Prostitution*

By the early 1800s, prostitution had become a delicate subject for an administration that wished to rid France of unsavory characters and restore order to a nation turned upside down by the social upheavals of the French Revolution. Bureaucratic officials eager to enact reforms made an equation between the radical changes brought on by the Revolution and the increasingly conspicuous presence of prostitutes on Parisian streets. A police report written during the Restoration period laments the loss of order that plagued the country after the dissolution of the monarchy. According to its nostalgic author, with the advent of the revolution, the old virtues disappeared, households were dismantled, workshops became disorganized, and now more than ever, venereal disease threatened the health of the nation.⁵²

Like Colquhoun, Parent Duchâtelet makes disorder synonymous with prostitution, observing that, "On doit regarder comme constant que toutes les filles qui se livrent à la prostitution publique ont déjà vécu dans le désordre pendant un temps ou moins long."⁵³ An eminent hygienist devoted to the improvement of public health, Parent-Duchâtelet was a passionate advocate of the application of the scientific method to the study of people. Like the disgruntled author of the police report, he saw the Revolution as an insurrection which interrupted the work of the administration.⁵⁴ Intellectuals like himself had to devise a remedy for the lack of method and order. An acquaintance with his *De la Prostitution à Paris au XIXe siècle*

⁵² Harsin, Judith. *Policing Prostitution*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 102

⁵³ Parent-Duchâtelet, Alexandre. *La Prostitution à Paris au XIXe siècle : Texte présenté et annoté par Alain Corbin*. (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1981), 87

⁵⁴ Harsin, 105

is instrumental in any study of prostitution, for Parent-Duchâtelet was the undisputed authority on femmes perdues during the nineteenth century. A highly methodical man, Parent-Duchâtelet came from a prestigious bourgeois family whose ancestors had served in the French Court of Audit for three hundred years. Against his family's wishes, he chose to study medicine and became a doctor in 1814 before entering the field of public health. During his active professional career, Parent-Duchâtelet tackled an unusual array of subjects. In fact, he seemed to enjoy studying topics that had previously been neglected by hygienists due to their repulsive nature: the disposal of dead horses, leg ulcers, the effect of emanations from putrefying animal matter on food, and the Parisian sewer system.

Conducted over a period of eight years from 1822-1835, his two volume study influenced all subsequent research and even literary works concerning prostitutes. Alain Corbin offers a glimpse of just how much of an impact *De la Prostitution* had on the construction of the prostitute: "Parent-Duchâtelet's portrait of the prostitute was repeated so often in the literature of prostitution and inspired so many novelists that, in addition to distorting the vision of later researchers...it determined to some extent the behavior of prostitutes themselves."⁵⁵ A bit overzealous at times, Parent-Duchâtelet was a firm believer in self-experimentation. Anecdotes about his life reveal that he trudged through sewage despite experiencing headaches and shortness of breath; he once requested that his wife and daughter sleep in a room with decaying feces to study the effect on their respiration. It is interesting to note that while he practiced self-experimentation in his former studies—even befriending one of the sewermen whom he interviewed—when studying prostitutes, Parent-Duchâtelet adamantly maintained a professional relationship with them. In the introduction to his book, he writes in capital letters,

⁵⁵ Corbin, 82

“[J’ÉTAIS]...TOUJOURS ACCOMPAGNÉ PAR UN INSPECTEUR.”⁵⁶ Parent-Duchâtelet’s comment here not only attests to his professionalism but also acknowledges an aspect of the nineteenth century mindset concerning prostitution--any interaction with these criminal women was likely to shed aspersion on one’s reputation.

What then, was the reasoning behind his study? In his previous works, Parent-Duchâtelet had expressed a genuine concern for the amelioration of public health and the progress of civilization. Recognizing prostitution as a necessary social function, he viewed its study as an opportunity to aid future generations and render them less susceptible to venereal disease. Like gas carrying the risk of explosion, desire was a force that required an outlet; prostitution thus served as a means of both physical and emotional catharsis.⁵⁷ Contrary to what many thought, according to Parent-Duchâtelet, the observation of prostitutes was a noble task. “Quand des motifs aussi nobles que l’amour du bien public nous entraînent dans des recherches, il faut, comme je j’ai dit au commencement de ce paragraphe, ne rien négliger de tout ce qui, d’une manière directe ou indirecte peut toucher à ce sujet.” His introduction actually takes a critical tone when discussing this issue, charging prejudiced persons who would be disgusted by his area of work with blindness and ignorance. “J’ai trouvé, dans la plupart des esprits, une défaveur particulière attachée aux fonctions de tous ceux qui, d’une manière ou d’une autre, s’occupent des prostituées...En me livrant à des recherches sur les prostituées, serais-je donc nécessairement flétri par le contact de ces malheureuses ?”⁵⁸

Finding a better suited candidate for this inglorious task would have been difficult; Parent-Duchâtelet took pride in his work, considering himself qualified to correct the faults of

⁵⁶ Parent-Duchâtelet, 66

⁵⁷ Parent-Duchâtelet, 13

⁵⁸ Parent-Duchâtelet, 59

those who had studied prostitution before him. For authors such as Colquhoun whose work was tinged with references linking prostitutes to “fallen women” in the Bible, Parent-Duchâtelet had overt criticism. He condemns previous studies as containing numerous errors and false ideas that demonstrate the immorality of some authors, the dogmatic virtue of others, and the absolute ignorance of all.⁵⁹ On the contrary, *De la Prostitution* inverted structures by positing alternative representations of prostitutes in ways that emphasized their humanity and sometimes contradicted traditional norms.

Parent-Duchâtelet begins his query into this sordid underworld by defining the term prostitute--an indication that the word “prostitute did not have the same meaning for everyone. According to the administrative language, a prostitute was a woman or girl who abandoned herself to disorder, surrendering her body to another. Here once again, we see the obsession with order versus disorder that so characterized the nineteenth century mindset. During the eight years he inspected *femmes perdues*, Parent-Duchâtelet observed only a certain type of prostitute. It was the *fille publique*, the woman who roamed the streets or sold herself in Parisian lodging houses, cafés, or brothels whom he devoted his time and energy to. Through these women who had contact with men from all levels of society, he hoped to present the real France in her diversity and her marginal criminality.⁶⁰ Only prostitutes who posed a threat to the public through the venereal diseases they carried aroused his interest; thus, he did not study kept women or courtesans, nor did he interview any of their clients.

Parent-Duchâtelet’s love of precision which he claimed “*était une vraie religion*” becomes evident when regarding the various socio-economic and physical traits of prostitutes he

⁵⁹ Parent-Duchâtelet, 61

⁶⁰ Parent-Duchâtelet, 13

compiled in his study.⁶¹ *“L’utilité, je dirais Presque la nécessité d’entreprendre ce travail, m’étant démontrée, je devais l’aborder franchement, et c’est ce que j’ai fait...j’ai dû appeler les choses par leur nom et marcher droit à mon but. Homme libre et sans place, je distribuerai avec impartialité la louange et le blâme ; homme exempt de préjuges, je saurai dire tout ce que peuvent réclamer de moi la science, le bien de la société, et celui de la classe infortunée qui m’a fourni tant des sujets d’études et de méditations. » De la Prostitution* includes detailed tables listing characteristics such as birthplace, legitimacy versus illegitimacy, education level, the occupation of the prostitute’s father, and the age at which they lost their virginity. In attempting to ascertain traits common to all prostitutes, Parent-Duchâtelet reveals himself to be partial to the ideology of naturalism that stipulated people were products of their family history and environment. Physical as well as personal characteristics were understood to be a consequence of parentage and environment. He insinuates that women unaware of their birthplace would naturally fall into prostitution. *“Une des lois constantes de nature, c’est que les êtres vivants ressemblent ax ceux qui les produisent, et que les générations se transmettent les vices aussi bien que les bonnes qualités de corps et de l’esprit . »*⁶²

Evolutionary theory did not originate with *Darwin’s Origin of Species* in 1859. Several theories had already been in circulation by the time of Parent-Duchâtelet’s study. Thomas Malthus’ argument that without the practice of birth control, the rapidly increasing population growth would doom mankind to starvation and a struggle for existence also influenced Darwin’s natural selection theory. Limited resources necessitated population control. Since Malthus’ theories maintained that the proletariat would always suffer, the upper class conservatives held them in high esteem. The wealth of the upper class guaranteed that its members would always

⁶¹ Parent Duchâtelet, 319

⁶² Parent-Duchatelet, 60

have sufficient resources and would end up on top—winners in the battle for “survival of the fittest.”⁶³ Malthus’ principle of population growth had dire social implications. Why should the wealthy waste their time and money helping the poor if there would never be enough resources to sustain their existence? Malthusian theories therefore validated arguments for the regulation of the poor as a way to control the excesses of this class who could not support itself.

Jean-Baptiste Lamarck’s theory of evolution took a more humanistic angle. His presuppositions published in *Zoological Philosophy* in 1809 are most notable for their emphasis on the inheritance of acquired characteristics. According to Lamarck, an organism could pass on to its offspring any characteristics it had acquired in its lifetime. Human characteristics and traits were the result of one’s environment and the environment of one’s parents. Lamarckian principles were popular among socialists who used them to argue for equal rights and liberty for all human beings. If all individuals were born in equal conditions, then there would be no reason for any group to assert superiority over another since biologically as well as financially, they would be on equal footing.⁶⁴ Whereas Malthusian theory claimed that there was “an unresolvable condition of strength over weakness and demand over supply,” Lamarckian theory took a more leveling view, asserting that “through progression, a continual movement upward through exertion, education, emancipation and democratic involvement” all individuals would have the opportunity to develop and evolve.⁶⁵

⁶³ Contrary to popular belief, « survival of the fittest » was not a term originally associated with Darwin’s work but was coined later on in the nineteenth century by evolutionist Herbert Spencer

⁶⁴ Deluxe, Frank. “Jean Baptiste Lamarck, Thomas Robert Malthus, Science and Society.” *Everything2*. Accessed April 20, 20011.
<http://everything2.com/title/Jean+Baptiste+Lamarck%252C+Thomas+Robert+Malthus%252C+Science+and+Society>

⁶⁵ “Jean Baptiste Lamarck, Thomas Robert Malthus, Science and Society.”

Although Parent-Duchâtelet agreed with the Malthusian claim that poverty, famine and disease were the natural outcomes of overpopulation, he took a Lamarkian approach in his description of how a prostitute's environment affected her nature: "*La prostitution peut donc être considérée, par un certain genre de filles, comme la suite et la conséquence presque inévitable...l'inconduite des parents et les mauvais exemples de toute espèce qu'ils donnent à leurs enfants doivent être considérés pour beaucoup de filles, et en particulier pour celles de Paris, comme une des causes premières de leur détermination.*"⁶⁶ Interviews with prostitutes as well as records provided by the Bureau des Mœurs showed that disorder and sexual immorality were features present in neighborhoods where most prostitutes were raised. According to Parent - Duchâtelet, the folders on each girl "*font sans cesse mention de désordre dans les ménages, de pères veufs vivant avec des concubines, des amants de mères veuves ou mariées, de pères et mères séparés, etc.*" With parents whose sexual practices were undisclosed to their children and the influence of such an immoral environment, such girls would inevitably embrace licentiousness. Although his discourse highlights the sexual immorality of working-class prostitutes, Parent-Duchâtelet was not condemnatory of the lower classes but advocated for social reform which would relieve the plight of the poor. The prostitute's carnality was a consequence of circumstance—the social environment of her parents. Once removed from the source of their physical and moral pollution, lower-class members of society would, as Lamarkian theory predicted, morally evolve and the distinctions between social classes would become less evident.

Contrary to popular belief, most prostitutes were from the areas surrounding the Seine; they were not poor country girls who had fallen victim to vice once in the city. The tables show

⁶⁶ Parent-Duchâtelet, 90

that most women were of the artisan class, with butchers, journalists, carpenters, proprietors, printers, painters, and masons being the occupations the most common for their fathers. Parent-Duchâtelet went so far in his obsession with classification that he included a section on the anuses of prostitutes, and even requested that women sequestered in religious houses during medical treatment hand over their underwear so he could better understand the effect of isolation on menstruation.

In addition to these socio-economic factors, Parent-Duchâtelet also included his observations regarding the nature of prostitutes in a chapter entitled “*Moeurs et Habitudes des Prostituées*.” His opinionated comments about these women rather than the compilation of statistics discussed above reveal a more comprehensive picture of the nineteenth-century prostitute. Admittedly, it must be taken into account that as a male belonging to France’s haut bourgeoisie, Parent’s notes are coloured by the sexist and prejudiced views of his social class. Generalizations that clearly do not appertain to each individual, they nonetheless afford readers with insight into the motivations and desires of *femmes perdues*. The portrait of prostitutes that we first encounter grounds itself in stereotypes common about these women: prostitutes are dirtier than most; they practice bad hygiene and are reluctant to change their underwear which they wear until it reaches a deplorable state. Prostitutes share the traits of overconsumption, drunkenness, and gluttony. They sleep till they like and enjoy drinking when they first wake in the morning. “Punch is a favorite liquor of all prostitutes” and the abuse of liquor accounts for their often deep voices.⁶⁷ Furthermore, prostitutes are violent and aggressive: when they do not use their feet and fists to fight, they implement sharp instruments, more commonly their combs.

⁶⁷ Parent-Duchâtelet. 105

Perhaps the most interesting section of the study describes false names and tattoos common among prostitutes.

According to Parent-Duchâtelet, the names of these women often gave an indication of their education level and the society they frequented. The most popular names for prostitutes of the inferior class include Belle-Cuisse, Faux-Cul, Mignarde, and Colette while for those of the more elevated classes we see Calliope, Olympe, Balzamine, and Delphine. Parent-Duchâtelet also describes the occurrence of women who would tattoo their lover's names on their arms as proof of their passion. If a prostitute acquired a new lover, a second tattoo would be placed above or below the old one. Thus, through tattoos one could trace a history of a prostitute's love life, from the break-ups which would appear as broken arrows through a name or her current lover whose name would sometimes be accompanied by hearts, doves, winged Cupids, or flowers.

The subsequent section of *De La Prostitution* offers an unexpected portrayal of prostitute's behavior, a surprising one given the mindset of Parent-Duchâtelet's social class. "*Bonnes qualities des prostituées*" discusses the various altruistic characteristics that prostitutes possess despite their immoral status. In a surprisingly sentimental portrait of these women, Parent-Duchâtelet states that they are unusually kindhearted. He has seen women assist former prostitutes who can no longer work, giving them bread every week or sometimes even every day. They also are more likely than typical members of society to help strangers and *familles nombreuses* who reside in the same building. When sick, prostitutes show genuine concern for each other's health. In what is perhaps the most surprising admittance, prostitutes are more likely than married women or non-prostitutes to feed and care for their infants themselves. With this task, they received help from their compatriots who often aided in washing the baby's laundry or

feeding children. Whereas for normal women, their illegitimate children were a source of shame, for prostitutes, these children were a source of pride and joy. In a brief anecdote illustrating the strength of the maternal instinct among prostitutes, Parent-Duchâtelet tells of a woman who had lost her infant son for a month due to her imprisonment. The dejected woman became so ill that police were forced to return her child to her custody lest she die from heartbreak.

In the same vein, Parent-Duchâtelet asks the question, “Can prostitutes, despite their habits and vices conserve some semblance of modesty?” Such a question shows Parent-Duchâtelet to be situated in the deeply gendered ideologies of his time, for according to popular discourses concerning the characteristics of the female sex, modesty was the supreme attribute that a woman could possess. Parent-Duchâtelet himself draws attention to the value of this virtue, calling it “the most beautiful ornament of woman.”⁶⁸ The answer to this inquiry would have been astonishing to an audience that expected the worst of prostitutes. Even the author of *De la Prostitution* is startled by the results of his observations: prostitutes do indeed reserve some modesty, and in the majority of cases react in much the same way that one would expect of more socially accepted women. He goes on to describe instances in which prostitutes will adamantly refuse to appear before interrogators if improperly clothed, or will blush with shame when required to undress before several people, and with an instinctive movement, will hide their eyes or attempt to cover their genitals.

Seen from a modern perspective, it would appear that Parent-Duchâtelet over estimates the prostitute’s exhibition of modesty. Few women—even in today’s world where nudity is more commonplace –would not attempt to cover their body if surprised while changing. What he takes as extraordinary is merely behavior typical to all women, regardless of their social status.

⁶⁸ Parent-Duchâtelet, 95

Nevertheless, his attitude reveals the extent to which prostitutes were considered as women completely dissimilar to other members of their sex. As depicted in the section conveying the vices of prostitutes, a specific web of associations that colored a prostitute's character existed. Unacceptably brazen, sexually immodest, and oftentimes inappropriately dressed, the prostitute was essentially the antithesis of the bourgeois wife or daughter which littered French conduct literature throughout the nineteenth century. The most pleasing images of women, especially those situated within the middle-class home, centered on stereotypical perceptions such as the content wife who only revealed her body to her husband due to the conjugal obligation to procreate.

Parent-Duchâtelet's revelations in this chapter would have come as a surprise to his nineteenth century audience who could never have conceived that a prostitute would exhibit such modesty or display touchingly maternal characteristics. While he does give a presentation of their negative attributes that conform to popular conceptions, Parent-Duchâtelet also reveals another side of the prostitute that humanizes her and even justifies her actions. When considering his discussion of the clients of certain girls, readers can almost discern what would appear to be a tone of respect for the prostitute who assured the health of her clientele by only receiving married men who were familiar in the neighborhood. Rather than condemning *femmes perdues* for being in opposition to their socially conventional roles, Parent-Duchâtelet presents an overview of their general characteristics and background that draws sympathy from readers. As exemplified in the following excerpt, the pages of *De la Prostitution* describe a prostitution created out of the social configurations of the city and economic circumstances of poor women:

“Of all the causes of prostitution, particularly in Paris and probably in the other large cities, there is none more active than the lack of work and misery, the inevitable result of insufficient salaries. What are the earnings of our dressmakers, our seamstresses, our

menders, and in general all those who occupy themselves with the needle? When one compares the wages of the most able with what the merely mediocre talents can earn, one will see if it is possible for these last to procure the strict necessities; let one compare especially the price of their labor with that of their dishonor, and one will cease to be surprised to see such a great number fall into a disorder that is, so to speak, inevitable.”⁶⁹

This grim portrayal reads as a warning to the city’s administration that unless these economic disparities are resolved, the women of France’s working class will inevitably be drawn into prostitution as the only means by which they can support themselves. Most importantly, Parent-Duchâtelet’s study demonstrated that for most women, prostitution was only a temporary state arising out of economic necessity rather than the natural result of their libertine nature.⁷⁰ All in all, the image of the prostitute constructed in this work is one that is less alien, and more humane than traditional representations.

Henry Mayhew and *London Labour and the London Poor*

At the time that Parent-Duchâtelet’s *De la Prostitution* was published in France, England lacked the vast amount of information that French experts had concerning prostitutes. While Colquhoun’s *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* was a start, until mid-century, few statistical studies on the English prostitute that could parallel Parent-Duchâtelet’s investigation existed. As one 1851 commentator observed, the time was ripe for a similar inquiry and further study: “As to other social consequences of the present state of things, until we have mastered the great work of Parent-Duchâtelet, and studied the records of the *Congres General d’Hygiène*....we are not justified in forming, still less in expressing a judgment on one of the most important problems of the day. We will only remark that, in ages when there was more real,

⁶⁹ Parent-Duchatelet. 102-104

⁷⁰ Harsin, 123

though less affected, zeal for public morals than in our own, such subjects received—as they do now in almost all countries except England—the earnest and practical attention of the authorities both in Church and State.”⁷¹ The writer’s request would soon be satisfied, for later that year, journalist and social investigator Henry Mayhew published his detailed study on prostitutes and other members of London’s laboring classes.

Perhaps the most individualized representations of nineteenth century prostitutes are to be found Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*—an enormous four volume work which made Parent-Duchâtelet’s thorough study look succinct in comparison. Like Parent-Duchâtelet, Mayhew had a great passion for investigation, compiling thousands of pages worth of information on the social undesirables that comprised London’s underworld as well as members of the working class. By the time he published *London Labour and the London Poor* in 1851, he became an established figure in the field of investigative journalism.⁷² Emerging from obscurity in 1849, he was first publicly known as one of the staff of the Morning Chronicle. No subject was off-limits to this ambitious journalist, who wrote on everything from politics to society gossip. An advocate of Christian socialism, Mayhew was a sympathetic commentator on the plight of the laboring classes and the exploitation they faced at the hands of capitalism. During his active career as a writer and researcher, he was a champion of the city’s underprivileged inhabitants whom he feared would embark on a downward spiral into the pit of depravity unless granted the power to overcome their economic and social predicaments.

⁷¹*The Leader* 4:227 (July 29, 1854), 754. Web. Nineteenth-century serials edition. Accessed on April 21, 2011 <http://ncse-viewpoint.cch.kcl.ac.uk/Default.htm?href=LDR%2F1854%2F07%2F29&page=8&entityid=Ar00801&view=entity>

⁷² Additionally, Mayhew’s daguerreotypes which graced the pages of popular literary magazines and journals of the time, including his own newspaper *Punch*, are some of the most well-known illustrations of the nineteenth century.

A miracle of research, Mayhew's investigative study used the metaphor of illumination to denote its purpose, "Every phase of vice has been investigated and treated of, in order that all possible information that can prove interesting to the moralist, the philanthropist, and the statist, as well as the general public, might be afforded. In a word the veil has been raised, and the skeleton exposed to the view of the public." *London Labour and the London Poor* thus shares this quality with the previously discussed works of *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis* and *De la Prostitution*—the desire to expose the grimy, unpleasant facts of modern life and seek out what most would wish to keep hidden. The culmination of years spent researching and writing, Mayhew's chef-d'oeuvre endeavored to catalogue the reality of life for nearly all members of London's laboring and criminal classes-- from the seasonal flower girls who sold roses and petunias during the springtime to the coarse fishwives heard bellowing, "Tuna, six pence a pound" on busy market days, to the swindlers who made their living stealing from unwary pedestrians.

Although his study is colored by religious and political opinions, like Parent-Duchâtelet, Mayhew understood the importance of the scientific approach and attempted to conduct his investigations from an unbiased standpoint—an undertaking which he ultimately failed. What results is a hybrid of sensationalist journalism, social commentary, and hard facts. Vivid depictions of prostitutes' lives, ranging from "the smell of mustard-and cress-that filled a night-house frequented by soldiers' women" or the avoidance of gas lamps by old women practicing their trade in darkened alleyways, were interwoven with statistics cataloguing the quantity and various hierarchies that made up the world of London prostitution. According to Mayhew, the ultimate goal of *London Labour and the London Poor* was to "publish the history of a people, from the lips of the people themselves—giving a literal description of their labour, their earnings,

their trials, and their sufferings, in their own unvarnished language.” Indeed, filled with detailed characterizations as well as colorful interviews, Mayhew’s study accomplished such a goal.

Unlike Colquhoun and Parent-Duchâtelet who emphasized his restraint in dealing with *filles publiques*, Mayhew got his hands dirty—delving into the lives of prostitutes, frequenting criminal haunts, bars, and questionable neighborhoods in order to gain a first-hand perspective of the reality of London street life for these women. To read Mayhew’s accounts of prostitutes and their haunts is to immerse oneself in the sights and sounds of the London underworld—to hear the lively polkas and waltzes danced by sailors’ women in foreign lodging houses or follow the path of a dress lodger as she walked through the fashionable West End, fooling gullible men with her dress of cheap silk.

London Labour and the London Poor received widespread praise for the depth of its content. As one review of his work said, “The labours of Henry Mayhew are of national importance... Mr. Mayhew in his own words is but a mere collector of facts, endeavouring to discover the several phenomena of labour with a view of arriving ultimately at the laws and circumstances affecting and controlling the operation and rewards of the labourer, as well as of sowing the importance of the poor and the working classes as members of the state.”⁷³ Important to note, Mayhew not only strove to present the experience of London’s urban poor from a methodological perspective, but also had a more humanistic goal in mind—the amelioration of tensions between England’s social classes. At least for one reader, Mayhew’s work had the desired effect—the enthusiastic commentator whose review of *London Labour and the London*

⁷³ “Our Street Folk.” *The Morning Post*, (November 15, 1851), 10. Accessed April 15, 2011. <http://ncse-viewpoint.cch.kcl.ac.uk/Default.htm?href=CLD%2F1851%2F11%2F15&page=12&entityid=Ar01201&view=entity>

Poor appeared in an 1851 edition of *The Leader*, commends Mayhew for the sympathetic feelings his study aroused, going so far as to compare him to a modern day Jesus:

““Follow Mayhew where Jesus loved to go, to the haunts of the publican and sinner, to the daily walks of the halt, the lame, and the blind. He shows us swarms of children, prematurely old in mind and vice, doomed to a lifelong, brutalizing drudgery, ignorant of schools and church and God, a heathenish generation in our midst...And he shows us, under a thick crust of foul and diseased humanity, bright and pure fountains of heroism and natural nobleness gushing forth from the inmates of the lazar-house, the brothel, and the goal.”

However thorough Mayhew’s investigation into the dark recesses of the London underworld may be, it appears that scientific impartiality had been forsaken for the goal of entertaining readers. Humorous anecdotes such as “Many of the poor girls are glad to pay her [an old and degraded prostitute] a sixpence occasionally to get rid of her company, as gentlemen are often scared away from them by the intrusion of this shameless hag, with their thick lips, sable black skin, leering countenance and obscene disgusting tongue, resembling a lewd spirit of darkness from the nether world”⁷⁴ fill the pages of *London Labour and the London Poor*. Or, “There was very little beauty broad that night, at least in the neighbourhood of Ratcliff Highway. I might have been hiding under a bushel, but it was not apparent to a casual observer.”⁷⁵ Even in sections intended to be mere descriptions, Mayhew’s opinions are salient through such quips.

Despite these faults, *London Labour and the London Poor* does deserve an important place in the history of social investigation due to its inclusion of prostitutes’ direct testimonies and the transcription of their colloquial diction. Such a feature differentiated it from previous studies and served to individualize each woman interviewed. Consider the dialogue that takes

⁷⁴ Mayhew, 359

⁷⁵ Mayhew, 229

place in a low lodging house between Mayhew and a prostitute who refers to herself as “Lushing Lucy:

“Well, I’ll tell yer,..I makes nearer on four pounds nor three—sometimes five. I ‘ave done eight and ten. Now Joe, as you ‘eered me speak on, he does it ‘ansome, he does: I mean, you know, when he’s in luck. He give me a fiver once after cracking a crib, and a nice spree me an’ Lushin Loo’ad over it. Sometimes I get three shillings, half-a-crown, five shillings, or ten occasionally, accordin’ to the sort of man...How did I come to take to this sort of life? It’s easy to tell. I was a servant gal away down in Birmingham. I got tired of workin’and slavin’ to make a livin’ and getting a—bad one at that; what o’ five pun’ a year and yer grub, I’d sooner starve, I would. After a bit I went to Coventry, cut Brummagem as we calls it in those parts, and took up with the soldiers as was quartered there. I soon got tired of them. Soldiers is good—soldiers is—to walk with and that, but they don’t pay; cos why, they ain’t got the money; so I says to myself, I’ll go to Lunnnon and I did. I soon found my level there. It is a queer sort of life, the life I’m leading, and now I think I’ll be off. Good night to yer. I hope we’ll know more of one another when we two meets again.”

This richly detailed account not only provides readers with an indication of the wages received by a lower-class prostitute--one that was not compiled by a statistician or outside commentator-- but gives the prostitute interviewed an authoritative voice. Such an interview gives the prostitute’s experience weight, serving as a witness to the veracity of her own testimony: her voice is made distinctive. Contrast this vignette starring “Lushing Lucy’s” to those seen in other investigations where the tone taken by the author influenced the reader’s perception and often eclipsed the prostitute’s own words. Through Mayhew’s stark portrayals, readers become cognizant of the fact that the prostitute is a figure whose worth cannot be measured by mere generalizations or statistics. The diverse range of characters appearing in this study thus furnished readers with a multifaceted spectrum of the prostitute’s motivations, experiences, and background, which helped to reinforce Mayhew’s contention that the experience of one prostitute was not indicative of all.

Admittedly, “Lushing Lucy’s” coarse dialogue does appear to validate stereotypes concerning working class women. Lucy is forward, uneducated, and perhaps worst of all, voluntarily uses her sexuality to earn a living—not out of economic necessity but because she was “tired of workin’ and slavin” to get by. To middle and upper class readers unused to the drudgery of manual labor, Lucy’s choice to pursue a carnal lifestyle would have been taken as an admission of her laziness and degenerate morals rather than as an attempt to escape the hardship of physical labor. And according to attitudes promulgated in conduct literature and moral treatises of the century, women of the lower classes were especially prone to such unsavory behavior. In the context of Victorian middle-class culture, the working class woman, here exemplified by the frank “Lushing Lucy,” was antithetical to the sexually pure bourgeois wife and daughter—women who would ideally be protected from corruptive influences by the confines of the home. Considering the prevalence of such holier-than-thou attitudes, Mayhew’s liberal characterizations are innovative for his time. He aims not to widen the abyss between lower class women and those of the upper classes, but to unite them in sisterhood. The following statement, “Go to a lady of fashion and tell her she could have even become a fishfag, and she will think you some mad ethnologist (if indeed she had even heard of the science)”⁷⁶ is not a moralistic comment preoccupied with the fundamental differences between social classes. Rather, it is a shrewd remark of an open-minded observer attuned to the fact that in most cases, poverty and criminal activity do not stem from the vices of their practitioners, but instead from the unjust and unbalanced structure of a society which sucked dry the life-force of the underprivileged in order to enrich the rest of its population.

⁷⁶ Mayhew, 443

While Parent-Duchâtelet's statistics that cast prostitutes of the lower class as most responsible for the spread of venereal disease widened the gap between social classes in Paris, Mayhew's work bridged the chasm between the bourgeois housewife and her scullery maid, debunking arguments that only women of a certain social class or disposition would choose such a carnal path. On the contrary, the conclusion that arises from an overview of Mayhew's work defines the nineteenth-century prostitute as essentially indefinable. When viewed in relation to the discourses of his social contemporaries, *London Labour and the London Poor* appears positively objective in comparison. However, considered from a retrospective standpoint, Mayhew's work reveals itself as flawed in its conception of what counted as prostitution. According to Mayhew, prostitution was not limited to those who received payment for their sexual favors, but includes "every woman who yields to her passions and loses her virtue."⁷⁷ In his own words, "Prostitution does not consist solely in promiscuous intercourse, for she who confines her favours to one may still be a prostitute; nor does it consist in illicit or unsanctioned intercourse, for, as we have seen, the intercourse may be sanctioned and still be prostitution in all intents and purposes"⁷⁸— a definition undoubtedly modeled upon the conservative sexual norms of his social class which took its cues from literal interpretations of Scripture. It must be noted that Mayhew's attempt to clarify the definition of prostitution in this statement reflects contemporary fears concerning the ambiguity over what comprised deviant sexuality. To an audience who may have been confused over how to regard the neighbor seen consorting with dashing young men at questionable hours of the night or the appropriate attention that should be paid to the Duke of Rochester's mistress, Mayhew's clarification would have been informative as well as reassuring in its affirmation of normative moral codes. While socially unclassifiable,

⁷⁷ Mayhew, 215

⁷⁸ Mayhew, 36

the prostitute as configured by Mayhew's stringent construction was more easily set apart by her exhibition of transgressive sexual behavior than by her social class.

Mayhew's construal of the prostitute that places her outside class generalizations is further supplemented by an impressive compilation of information regarding not just prostitution in London, but prostitution throughout the ages and around the globe. His historical overview of this trade demonstrates that prostitution indeed is the oldest profession in the world and comes in many forms: from the dancing girls of Egyptian harems to the docile maidens paid to serve men in Scandinavian bathhouses, prostitution belonged to all ages and to every nation—ultimately assuming various appearances in the different classes of mankind.”⁷⁹ *London Labour and the London Poor* not only explored the historical origins and ethnological manifestations of this practice, but also provided readers with an expansive compendium of attitudes regarding sexuality in general.

Nonetheless, as comprehensive as his representations of prostitution may be, Mayhew's attempt to depict the diverse elements of this trade prove to be nothing more than a condensed rehashing relying on ethnographic stereotypes and prosaic descriptions of foreign cultures. While his delightful sketches of London's underworld challenged conceptions regarding social undesirables, his discussion of foreign prostitutes emerges from the Anglo-centric beliefs that would have been only too familiar to the nineteenth century public. Defining populations living in warmer regions such as southern Italy as more voluptuous and licentious in spirit and reusing offensive tropes to refer to the “barbarous” inhabitants of Africa, Australia and the Americas, Mayhew underlines the extent to which racist beliefs were entrenched in the minds of white Europeans in his narrative. Alternatively, such preoccupations with the sexuality of foreign

⁷⁹ Mayhew, 106

populations highlighted the complex entwinement of desire and repulsion that characterized the European male's perception of native women. A sense of her cultural superiority pervaded mid-nineteenth century England at the height of her colonial prowess. Sentiments used to justify the expansion of colonialism and the exploitation of natives by whites could be overheard in lecture halls where social scientists educated audiences on the intellectual deficiencies of indigenous populations or could be glimpsed in journals such as Parbury's *Oriental Herald and Colonial Intelligencer*.

In light of the promotion of such sexist and racist views, *London Labour and the London Poor* is a far cry from the detached scientific commentary of *De La Prostitution*. For nineteenth century readers, this array of material would have been highly impressionable, validating the ethnographic stereotypes gaining prevalence as the century progressed while upholding anthropological theories situating the white male at the pinnacle of the evolutionary chain. Despite its failure to extinguish the evil of prostitution, Western European civilization could take pride in its Christian morals and eschewal of barbaric customs such as the polygamy practiced on other continents. In fact, prostitution in nineteenth century England seems quite tame when compared to the forms it took in less civilized societies.

Mayhew's discussion of prostitution around the globe thus should not be taken as an accurate portrayal but rather read as a discursive synthesis of social and moral attitudes that spoke to its audience of Britain's cultural dominance. Even in his section detailing prostitution in France, Mayhew demonstrates the predisposition to devalorize other cultures, blaming the French Revolution for the spread of immorality across Europe and defining Paris as a city

perpetually caught in the grip of vice.⁸⁰ Although his presentation of French prostitution relies on statistics presented in *De La Prostitution* and praises the work of Parent-Duchâtelet, he nevertheless applies the same sexual generalizations that mark his descriptive sketches of indigenous cultures—denoting the French people as profligate in nature. In its propagation of England’s cultural superiority, *London Labor and the London Poor* downplays the problem of prostitution in London. It may be more accurate, however, to consider Mayhew’s multi-faceted depiction of prostitution as an isolated criticism of British society rather than as a comparative study. The interpretation arising from this appraisal suggests that for the author of *London Labour and the London Poor*, the most pressing issue to be addressed was the unbalanced social configuration of British society.

For Mayhew, the fundamental question was not, “What category of women end up as prostitutes?” but rather “Why should prostitution have to exist at all?” While the hundreds of pages written on prostitution’s historical roots would seem to support the contention that prostitution always has and always will exist, Mayhew takes the opposite stance. His unconventional opinion concerning the *raison d’être* of this illicit trade differentiates him from his predecessors and many of his contemporaries. Unlike Colquhoun and Parent-Duchâtelet, he did not consider prostitution a necessary evil but rather a lamentable condition resulting from economic disparities and society’s lack of moral cohesion. Working class men and women fundamentally lived their lives according to norms different than those of their more privileged compatriots. Given this separatist feature of British society—how could England unite its people under the umbrella of Christian doctrine?

⁸⁰ Mayhew, 205

Mayhew's questions combining his religious views with his socialist learnings reveal his concern with this conundrum: "Could the Creator have pronounced his work "very good" with such an inseparable appendage to social life?" Again, how comes it that a "necessary evil" only exhibits itself in certain localities, and under particular circumstances, disappearing altogether in uncivilized countries, and gathering strength and virulence in the most refined states of society? Necessity, and not the demand, creates the supply here, and it is well known that the supply suggests the demand."⁸¹ In spite of his ethnocentric biases, Mayhew espouses a critical viewpoint in regards to the predicaments faced by his own metropolis, stating, "If it be civilized, it will be moral; but civilization is a false name when it is applied to a corrupt and enervated society. Art and luxury are not its highest evidences; but virtue and obedience to the exalted maxims of ethical philosophy"⁸² The iniquitous nature of London's social configurations that bred discontent among marginalized members of her population, thereby leading to an increase in criminal practices threatening the moral and physical well-being of all, inherently taint this city, which serves as a prime example of the meritorious achievements of modern civilization.

Despite the discouraging assertions that no state left untainted by the blemish of prostitution or no woman who cannot fall prey to its temptations exists, Mayhew's work ultimately has an uplifting message: readers need not fear that all is lost and that London will end up a modern day Babylon. In order to eradicate prostitution from English soil, members of British society must first turn their attention to the social and economic conditions encouraging the practice of prostitution. Readers only have to take up the mantle espoused by Mayhew and direct their efforts towards the protection of the underprivileged and the sincere application of Christian morals in their diurnal activities. In the intricate detail and variety of characters

⁸¹ Mayhew, xxxviii

⁸² Mayhew, 165

illustrated on its pages, *London Labour and the London Poor* not only constituted a variegated representation of prostitutes and other working class members, but also served as a prescriptive tool for agencies and individuals wishing to aid these populations. The purpose of this study then, was not to frighten, but to inspire change amongst readers and most importantly, those who have the power to enact reform and regulation.

No longer could Victorian sexual norms be compromised by turning a blind eye to the double standard regarding sexual relations. If they professed themselves to be ardent Christians who defined their lives by the tenets of the Holy Gospel, men of all social classes should cease attempts to seduce impressionable young women, refrain from sex with prostitutes, preserve their chastity until marriage, and abstain from adulterous liaisons with these women. Likewise, women should be paragons of virtue, refuse sexual advances, and never engage in unchaste behavior—thereby avoiding compromising situations that could drag them closer to prostitution’s ensnaring grip. Furthermore, those who are privileged enough to live a comfortable lifestyle, unburdened by the financial worries plaguing those who lacked steady employment or the means to support themselves, should share their prosperity with the less fortunate and consequently help to mitigate the economic disparities that pushed men and women into vice.

To encourage readers to exhibit such self-less behavior, Mayhew elaborated on several reformatory and preventative agencies, arguing that in the noble endeavor to hinder crime, it was more effective to “uproot a noxious weed than to pluck off its poisonous berries⁸³.” In *A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis*, Colquhoun also encourages a similar approach, stating that “if persons in this unhappy situation had it in their power to resort to a medium, whereby they might be reconciled to their relations, while uncontaminated by the vices attached to General

⁸³ Mayhew, xvi

Prostitution, numerous of them who are not lost, might be saved to Society.”⁸⁴ According to figures enumerated in *London Labour and the London Poor*, no less than 530 charitable societies existed in London and they received no less than 3,500,000 pounds annually.⁸⁵ Mayhew stresses the importance of reformatory institutions which succeeded where penitentiary systems often failed. Difference stemmed from the fact that disciplinary organizations could not force women to submit to their often harsh discipline. Prostitutes preferred curative ones such as The Magdalen Hospital where they could be treated for venereal disease in a more lenient and understanding environment. Mayhew estimates the number of prostitutes housed in reformatory institutions at 1,000—a disheartening figure given that there were 80,000 practicing prostitutes in London alone. Only one woman out of every eighty had the opportunity to be rescued. As a remedy to this gross imbalance, he directs readers to either volunteer or financially aid organizations such as the Associated Institution which, since its foundation in 1841, had shut down more than seventy-houses of ill-fame notorious for their role in enticing young women into prostitution.

A review of Mayhew’s study published in *Notes and Queries* indicates that *London Labour and the London Poor* had achieved its goal, inspiring at least one reader to consider London’s lower-class members in a sympathetic light:

“His work is of the most painful interest, for it paints in vivid colours the misery, ignorance, and demoralisation in which thousands are living at our very doors; and its perusal must awaken in every right minded man an earnest desire to do his part towards assisting the endeavours of the honest poor to earn their bread--towards instructing the ignorant, and towards reforming the vicious.”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Colquhoun, 335

⁸⁵ Mayhew, xvii

⁸⁶ *Notes and Queries* Vol. 4(108) Nov 22 1851, 413

History, however, had proven that the majority of English society was not ready to take such drastic measures or play “the Good Samaritan.” The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1848 and struggles to affect changes to the Poor Law demonstrated that such egalitarian ideas were ahead of their time. Mayhew’s proposals, undoubtedly influenced by his Christian socialist beliefs, proved too revolutionary for his milieu. As stated by an admirer of his work “It is difficult to rise from a perusal of his pages without becoming Socialist.”⁸⁷ . However, Mayhew was not ignorant of the tensions aggravating relations between the upper and lower classes—aware that given the current state of Victorian England, he knew that his self-disciplinary vision remained implausible for the time-being. Until all of society could embrace his utopian ideals, the only recourse left in suppressing prostitution was its regulation by government authorities.⁸⁸

CONCLUSION

By the mid-nineteenth century, the fundamentally religious and moral concerns of eighteenth century investigators such as Colquhoun had grown to include a more potent worry over the amorphous contours of urban prostitution. It was essential to know who prostitutes were in order to regulate them lest they come back into Society and pass as respectable women—a possibility that could lead to the moral contagion of wives and daughters. Who was and who was not a prostitute? The stereotypical molds which cast her as “the fallen woman” or “the streetwalker whose impurity was manifest in her coarse, working-class features” were far too limited in their scope and failed to consider each prostitute’s unique history. As this nineteenth century physician asks, “Who are those fair creatures, neither chaperone nor chaperoned, “those

⁸⁷ “Our Street Folk.” *The Leader* 2:86. (November 15, 1851), 1088. Nineteenth Century Serials Edition.

⁸⁸ This will be discussed in the following chapter.

somebodies whom nobody knows,” who elbow our wives and daughters in the parks and promenades and rendezvous of fashion?⁸⁹

The portrait of urban prostitution beginning to take form in these discourses was one that spoke of the many different ways prostitutes could occupy space in the city: as kept mistresses, prima donnas who belonged to the first “class” and lived in a superior style; as *convives* who lived in the same house as others; as board lodgers—those who gave a portion of what they received to their landlord or mistress in exchange for board and lodging; or dress lodgers whose brightly coloured silks and taffetas were intended to make her passageway through the city apparent to male-passersby; as clandestine streetwalkers; as *filles de maisons* under constant surveillance; or as sailors women or as thieves who masqueraded as prostitutes only to rob their customers. The world of the urban prostitution was one that allowed her to perform her illicit trade in broad daylight, amid the gas-lit groves of pleasure gardens, behind the walls of houses “devoted to the vilest purposes,” or even from the front steps of houses, where as stated by one commentator, she beckoned men into temptation’s grip.⁹⁰ Together, these women represented the malignant presence of disease and immorality that infected the city, turning “London [into] a cauldron of crime, a charnel house of impurity.”⁹¹

A desire to make visible what had once been concealed marked mid-nineteenth century London and Paris, worlds where once hidden recesses of city streets were illuminated by the dazzling light of newly installed gas-lamps, and where novel photographic devices faithfully noted the physiognomy of cities and their residents. Mayhew’s investigative study made

⁸⁹ Acton, William. “Prostitution considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and other large cities; with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils.” *Leader: A Political and Literary Review* 9.415 (1858): 240, 24

⁹⁰ Mayhew xxxii; Victorian Babylon 117, William Acton

⁹¹ Godwin

allusions to these critical features of mid-nineteenth century life and its desire to record and exhibit the various facets of the urban experience: “Every phase of vice has been investigated and treated of, in order that all possible information that can prove interesting to the moralist, the philanthropist, and the statist, as well as the general public, might be afforded. In a word the veil has been raised, and the skeleton exposed to the view of the public.”⁹² Just as it was necessary to carefully observe the diseased body, to chart the progress of its sickness, and to eliminate all sources of contamination before the illness proved fatal, it was necessary to possess omnipotent knowledge of prostitutes in order to control their behavior and stop the spread of vice. In their attempts to statistically record and catalogue the prostitute, these urban explorers embodied the post-Enlightenment preoccupation for surveillance and classification—two of the primary mechanisms which according to Foucault made knowledge a form of power.

To quote Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment*:

“Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has effects, and in that sense at least, 'becomes true.' Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practice. Thus, 'There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations’”⁹³

Nineteenth century discourses on prostitutes saw a transition from a primarily moral stance to one that was more scientific in its approach. As such, they constituted a form of knowledge that was more “veritable” than content that merely spoke of the prostitute’s sinful behavior from a religious standpoint. Systematic study rather than religious doctrine lead to this knowledge. The studies of experts such as Parent-Duchâtelet and Mayhew were thus more believable to an audience who had before them statistics, charts, and tables validating the experts

⁹² Mayhew, ix

⁹³ Michel, Foucault. *Discipline and Punishment*, (London, Tavistock, 1977), 27

opinions on this issue. Even Mayhew's colorful descriptions of prostitutes functioned as a mechanism of power—his individualization of the prostitute made her more accountable, more noticeable. She was no longer a faceless member of “the lost flock.”⁹⁴ By her association with a branch of study that dealt with facts and general laws—an authority of “truth”—the mid-nineteenth century discourse on the prostitute thus exercised a greater influence on her audience whom authors presented what they claimed to be accurate proof of prostitution's status in urban cities.

“Vice is a monster of such frightful mien,
That to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft—familiar with her face,
We first endure—then pity—then embrace.”⁹⁵

This poem found in Colquhoun's *A Treatise on the Metropolis of the Police* reflects the logic shared by the three studies investigated in this chapter which strove to acquaint readers with the nature of vice plaguing urban cities. These discourses made clear that while prostitution was a despised feature of urban life, its existence was impossible to eliminate. Though, one could not completely cure the diseased body of prostitution, through its regulation and legislation, officials aimed to treat “the festers and malignant sores with which the body of society is spotted.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Colquhoun , 335

⁹⁵ Colquhoun, 339

⁹⁶ Godwin, *Another Blow for Life*, 45

PART II
REGULATION AND THE PROSTITUTE

Chapter 2

Order and Control: The Regulation of Parisian Prostitution

“It is a difficult question to deal with—an exceedingly awkward subject—we must let it alone, we suppose—it is very dreadful, to be sure—but there will be always abandoned women, and they are a class it really soils one’s imagination to meddle with:--with such apologetic phrases the wandering soul is suffered to drift away.”⁹⁷

In an 1848 volume of the *Quarterly Review*, the above statement appears describing common reasons for neglecting to remedy the social and moral problems that prostitution posed in Victorian England. Despite a consensus that prostitution was a “great social evil” and an increase in authoritative literature on the subject, government officials had yet to initiate legislation regulating this illicit industry. As the unknown author of the article laments, a disinclination to recognize this vice prevented action from being taken by administrative individuals and officials. Indeed, although this had long been an issue religious and moral commentators had addressed in discourses, there was little discussion of prostitution in official spheres during the first half of the century. The last piece of legislation that dealt with this trade was a 1752 bill that did not target prostitutes themselves but rather the proprietors of establishments “that promoted the illicit intercourse of the sexes”.⁹⁸ The “Act for the better preventing of thefts and robberies and regulating places of public entertainment and punishment of persons keeping disorderly houses” made provisions for the prosecution of owners of houses where prostitutes conducted their business.

⁹⁷ “A Short Account of the London Magdalene Hospital. *Quarterly Review* 83 (1846) :359-378

⁹⁸ “The Bishop of Exeter and Prostitution.” *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser* 1.344 (1844). Web. NCSE Facsimiles.. Accessed April 4, 2011

This chapter will first investigate sentiments regarding regulation before going into a detailed discussion of its operation in nineteenth century France. For advocates of regulation, prostitution was more than a threat to public health but rather served as a pressing issue that reflected bourgeois obsessions of the time. The danger that prostitutes posed was linked with a myriad of other concerns that troubled bourgeois men and women—most importantly the control of individuals who failed to conform to middle-class norms. Based upon a rigid system of patriarchy that granted inordinate power to the police force that implemented its measures, the structure of the French regulatory system attempted to place the prostitute under constant surveillance and restrict her movement to specified districts of the city. In my presentation of French regulation, I will argue that this disciplinary institution was representative of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon and through the power exercised by its police force—prostitutes, as well as working-class women found themselves victimized by a system that necessitated their social control.

As an act which was meant to take place within the private domain, sex was a topic deemed unacceptable for discussion by Parliament, especially when regarding the unbridled sexuality of women. Furthermore, as demonstrated by one columnist's opinion on the regulation of prostitution, in passing laws regarding this trade, the government would sanction that which they could not approve.⁹⁹ Conservative viewpoints held that it was better to tolerate prostitution in its unregulated state than to control it and at the same time protect it. However, with the publication of Parent-Duchâtelet's *De la Prostitution* which had a wide reception in England, and Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and London Poor*, prostitution became a topic that more and more people felt should be addressed by the government. English audiences were impressed

⁹⁹ "Midnight Meetings of Fallen Women." *Leader and Saturday Analyst*. 1:527 (April 1860), 397-398

by Parent-Duchâtelet's methodological approach which presented the study of prostitution as no different than that of sewage systems, disease prevention or other topics deserving of administrative consideration. If the prostitute was a figure that could be observed, categorized and defined by men of science, then she could be discussed and controlled by politicians as well. Citizens at a meeting of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, attended by clergy, churchwardens, and other conservative religious figures argued that it was most important, if not absolutely necessary that as the guardian of public morals, Her Majesty's Government had a duty to remove so great a public scandal.¹⁰⁰ One angry writer to the editor of *The Times* criticized the judiciary's refusal to prevent the presence of prostitutes on city streets stating, "It is reported that a certain police magistrate, delivered as a judicial dictum that prostitutes must "walk" somewhere! If both law and necessity unite to support their perambulations, it is at all events the duty of the police to see that they "walk" in such a manner as not to annoy and insult peaceable persons and modest women, and that their "walking" does not extend to the knockers and bell-handles of the householders."¹⁰¹ This writer's opinionated commentary provides evidence that for Londoners, prostitution was an undesirable, but actual feature of city life. Nevertheless, while its practice could not be avoided, its visibility could be limited so that it would not offend impressionable members of the population, and its influence would not spread into the private sphere. The logic behind such assertions rationalized that as a vice that displayed itself in the public sphere, prostitution was no different from any other public offence and was thus liable to control by the State¹⁰².

¹⁰⁰ "Prostitution in the Metropolis." *The Times*, January 4, 1858, 4

¹⁰¹ "Prostitutes in the Haymarket. *The Times*. March 24, 1841, 6

¹⁰² "Prostitution in the Metropolis," 4.

Providing further fuel to the arguments for the passage of legislation regarding English prostitution was the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century, France already had forty years of experience in regulating prostitutes. Beginning in 1810, a law required that all prostitutes must register with the police, submit themselves to a medical examination and accept treatment within a prison hospital if diagnosed as diseased. The law additionally stipulated what areas a prostitute could and could not practice her trade. If a prostitute failed to comply with these rules or caused a public disturbance, she could be arrested by the police and imprisoned for six months. Parent-Duchâtelet was a firm advocate of this system whose results he praised in *De La Prostitution*, observing that “scenes of disgusting lewdness...are now very rare inside Paris itself, and the practice of good hygiene has spread...”¹⁰³ In the same description, he perceives that regulation even had an impact on the behavior of prostitutes: “One no longer sees the same haughty, irritating looks, the indecent dress, the lewd gestures and postures, the endless brawls; one no longer hears the filthy conversation and the vociferous shouting that are enough to terrify the visitor.”¹⁰⁴ It is Parent-Duchâtelet’s second remark that would have been of importance to moral commentators worried about the increasing boldness of prostitutes—deviant women whose occupation was outside the bounds of judicial control and whose vulgar behavior classed them as unfeminine and a menace to society. To readers of *De La Prostitution*, Parent-Duchâtelet’s statement offers proof that not only could a strong bureaucracy sustain public order but also affect the behavior of individuals.

A November 1860 account in *The Times* that details the conviction of Sarah Forest for assault and battery affords an illustration of how dangerous and uncontrollable prostitutes were becoming in the public imagination. According to the article, Ms. Forest who had long been

¹⁰³ Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la Prostitution*, 115

¹⁰⁴ Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la Prostitution*, 268

known as a prostitute in the neighborhood of St. James' Street and Piccadilly, suddenly came up behind Mr. William Epworth and clasped him around the waist. Due to her stature as a "strong, muscular, woman" Mr. Epworth was unable to extricate himself from her embrace and called out, "Do for God's sake, let me go, my good woman." To which Ms. Forest answered, "Ah, you oughtn't to ask me to do that when I've known you so long and so well." She then proceeded to stab his hand and rob him of his breast pin.¹⁰⁵ A survey of nineteenth century newspapers supplies other examples of such women ambushing men, luring them into darkened alleyways to steal their possessions, or even tying men up as they slept and making off with their belongings.¹⁰⁶ The image of a burly prostitute overpowering a former customer by hugging him would be a comical scene in a play or illustrated newspaper, but it furnishes a real example of contemporary fears regarding the transgression of gender roles. Simply by the nature of her occupation, a prostitute was the antithesis of feminine qualities cherished by traditional society. However, she posed even more of a threat to gender norms in cases like Sarah Forest's where her overt familiarity and aggressive behavior cast her as an uncontrollable individual that posed a physical danger to men. If such unfeminine women were allowed to walk freely on city streets, then how could the government maintain control over other undesirable members of English society?

With this question in mind, nineteenth century commentators increasingly turned to regulation as the answer to this dilemma. However, for Mayhew, Parent-Duchâtelet, and other experts, regulation was most justified not because of the moral and social solutions it proposed, but for the effect it would have on limiting the spread of venereal disease. Anxiety over the

¹⁰⁵ « Marlborough Street- Sarah Forest. » *The Times*. November 1, 1860. 11

¹⁰⁶ See articles in *The Times*, "Guildhall- Mary Sloat, one of the prostitutes..." 7 February 1823, 3, "On Wednesday evening, one of the common prostitutes..." September 28, 1827, 3.; and "Queen Square- Charlotte Webb..." Oct 1, 1833, 4

transmission of venereal disease can be seen as early as the fifteenth century when the introduction of the pox into Europe—believed to be the punishment of God—terrified populations, leading to disfigurement, dementia and death for its victims, and prompting Henry VIII to shut down London’s public stews in 1546.¹⁰⁷ Alongside the affront to gender roles and public decency that she posed, the prostitute also represented a threat to public health as the means by which disease was spread to healthy members of the population. When he paid a prostitute for sexual favors, a customer not only put himself at danger of being robbed by the woman or her cronies, but also put himself in danger of catching a venereal disease and transmitting it to his wife and children. In *De La Prostitution*, Parent-Duchâtelet condemns lower-class prostitutes known as *pierreuses* who conducted their trade at construction sites along the Seine away from light and surveillance. Making use of the darkness that nightfall afforded, the *pierreuse* could camouflage unattractive features or even worse—hide syphilitic sores from customers. Although she lacked an official name, the English counterpart to the *pierreuse*—the park woman who frequented the dark corners and pathways of London’s parks after 5pm—was described by Mayhew as “a degraded creature, utterly lost to all sense of shame.”¹⁰⁸

Both Mayhew and Parent-Duchâtelet considered the clandestine nature of prostitution to be the most serious obstacle to the eradication of syphilis. However, the status of prostitution in France compared to that of England drastically affected how officials in each nation could address its prevention and control. In the English case, the government could not require the treatment of venereal disease because there was no law that supervised the practice of

¹⁰⁷ Siena, Kevin. “Pollution, Promiscuity, and the Pox: English Venereology and the Early Modern Medical Discourse on Social and Sexual Danger. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8:4 (1998); 553-574

¹⁰⁸ Mahew, 243

prostitution¹⁰⁹. Because it was ignored by Parliament and left to operate unregulated on city streets, all prostitution was by definition clandestine. On the other hand, clandestine referred to only a portion of prostitutes in France—the *filles insoumises* who evaded the surveillance of authorities and failed to present herself for registration. According to Parent-Duchâtelet, these women were the most dangerous because they appeared to be women like any others, thereby increasing one's risk of moral and physical contagion.¹¹⁰ An 1835 study conducted by a Dr. Maireau concluded that every prostitute had contracted syphilis by the end of her second year. It is unclear whether this was a reliable figure, but it nevertheless would have been alarming in light of an 1820 statistical survey that calculated the number of *filles insoumises* to be 9,000 in Paris alone.¹¹¹

Regulation and le Bureau des Mœurs

Advocation of a strong English regulatory system appears again in an 1853 article in the *The Leader* noting, “The metropolis only wants a collective existence and an administrative power to call forth the means for placing itself in order, and becoming in aspect what it is in commerce and politics, a great civic imperium imperio.”¹¹² *Imperium imperio*, which translates to empire within an empire, was an accurate description of the Bureau des Mœurs—the authoritative force in charge of regulating prostitution in nineteenth century France.¹¹³ Parent-Duchâtelet praises this police force, designating them as “des homes d’un mérite consommé,

¹⁰⁹ Legislation requiring prostitutes to seek treatment for venereal disease was not seen until 1864. This will be discussed further in the chapter.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in *Women for Hire*, pg 8

¹¹¹ Céré, Paul. *Les populations dangereuses et les misères sociales*. (Paris : E. Dentu, 1872) 25

¹¹² *The Leader*. 4: 189. (Nov 5, 1853), 1067

¹¹³ Also known as the *regime des mœurs* or the *police des mœurs*

d'une expérience immense, et qui, dans leurs attributions respective, rendent à la chose publique des services d'autant plus méritoires que ces services sont ignorés et rétribués d'une manière très mesquine."¹¹⁴ To observers across the Channel who called for the control of prostitution and other criminal members of society, the Bureau des Mœurs was the quintessential representation of a hierarchical organization that allowed for the observation, control, and treatment of a deviant social group. Due to fears of potential abuse, the English police force had few resources to cope with riot, crime and disorder. The French police on the contrary, was infamous for the surveillance of citizens' private lives—a preventative measure intended to stop political plots, opposition movements or revolts before they could gain momentum. The institution's function was clearly expressed in an eighteenth century act entitled *Le Code de Brumière* : “ *La police est instituée pour maintenir l'ordre public, la liberté, la propriété, la sûreté individuelle.*”¹¹⁵ Less concerned with the violation of political rights, the French government organized and financed their police, granting them the power to secretly monitor citizens as well as control crime for the benefit of individual and public safety.

The bureau de mœurs was a disciplinary institution that embodied the Foucaultian definition of an effective police apparatus. Members of this branch were drawn from the Gendarme Royal with the majority being former soldiers who chose to enter the police force after their release from military service. Requirements for entry specified that agents be between the ages of 25-40, at least one and one half meters tall, able to read and write, and of honorable reputation—a claim that was proved by a certificate of good conduct signed by a reputable

¹¹⁴ Parent, Duchatelet. Alexandre. *La Prostitution à Paris au XIXe siècle*. Texte présenté et annoté par Alain Corbin. (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1981) 62

¹¹⁵ “L’activité policière à Quimper en 1907 » Archives *municipale à Quimper*. Accessed 13 April 2011 http://www.mairie-quimper.fr/84713391/0/fiche___pagelibre/&RH=ARCHIVES

member of society.¹¹⁶ According to Foucault, in order to exercise their power to the fullest, the police apparatus must be given “the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance capable of making all visible.”¹¹⁷ And thanks to the structure of the regulation system implemented in France, the bureau des mœurs was indeed given that. With a highly organized administrative body, official language classifying different types of prostitutes, and specific procedures detailing the registration, treatment, and confinement of these women, the regulation system was a modern mechanism of discipline that demonstrated the expression of nineteenth century power relations between men and women as well as authoritative forces and stigmatized individuals.

Regulation in mid-nineteenth century France was structured around three main provisions. Firstly, all prostitutes were to be registered at a police station, whereafter they were required to present themselves for examination at a local medical dispensary every month. The dispensary was the creation of an 1805 arrêté that established medical facilities where doctors could examine prostitutes as well as dispense drugs and other necessities. Secondly, prostitution would be confined to houses called maisons de tolerance; and lastly, the regulatory system would be managed by the bureau des mœurs and all prostitutes would be labeled using a specialized vocabulary. The system of categorization implemented by the bureau des mœurs made the following designations: the *fille en carte* was the prostitute who registered herself with the bureau and was given a card certifying her status as a healthy prostitute; the *fille de maison* worked in a maison de tolerance; the *fille isolée* was an independent but registered prostitute; and

¹¹⁶ Harsin, Judith. *Policing Prostitution*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press), 137

¹¹⁷ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison*. 2nd ed. (London :Vintage Books, 1995), 213

the *fille insoumise* was the prostitute who violated all regulations and failed to present herself for registration or examination.¹¹⁸

Alain Corbin's excellent analysis of nineteenth century prostitution also draws upon Foucaultian logic, portraying the French regulationist project as a carceral system that emphasized the difference between the private and public sphere and what defined behaviors were admissible in each. Through her compulsory confinement to one of four enclosed spaces—the maison de tolerance, the hospital, the prison, or an establishment where she could reform her ways once she was too old to work—the prostitute could spend her entire career under the supervision of official authorities. The possibility of being sent to Saint-Lazare or the Petite Force—prisons for *filles publiques*--was intended to scare the prostitute into compliance with regulatory measures and ensure order in the maisons de tolerance, the dispensary, and hospitals where she was sent for extended treatment.¹¹⁹ Built in the eleventh century for the treatment of lepers, Saint-Lazare had a history of housing deviant populations ranging from lepers and depraved men, to undisciplined priests and the mentally ill. In 1794, it was designated as a medico-social centre intended to both treat and imprison prostitutes infected with venereal disease. An 1843 study estimated that 1,250- 1,300 women were housed in this facility.¹²⁰ There was no set length of imprisonment but a typical sentence was one month for a first offense, two or three months for subsequent arrests, and six months for women who had been repeatedly arrested.

¹¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the English translation of *fille insoumise* means “unsubdued girl.”—a definition that perhaps reflects the desire to control female sexuality

¹¹⁹ Corbin, Alain. *Women for Hire*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990) 13

¹²⁰ Mallet, Josephine. *Les Femmes en prison: Causes de leur chutes, moyens de les relever*. 2nd ed. (Paris : Moulins, 1845)

As the only domain where the practice of prostitution was officially sanctioned, the maison de tolerance was the most important of these enclosed spaces and represented a domestication of illicit sexual activity that before had taken place in sites intended for public use. According to regulatory specifications that reflected concerns over the moral contamination of impressionable individuals, the maison de tolerance could only be located in certain districts known as quartiers réservés and never near a school, church, or public building. The exterior of maisons were also regulated—windows were required to be built of frosted glass and covered by metal bars. Contained within this house whose outside appearance more resembled a prison than a veritable home, the prostitute would thus be hidden from the public eye and the practice of her profession would be severely curtailed.

Despite the provision dictating their uniform appearance, each maison de tolerance differed from the other according to the social status of its customer base. Maisons which drew their clientele from the bourgeoisie or aristocracy had luxurious interiors that mimicked those of upper-class homes and boasted well-stocked dining rooms, salons decorated with popular paintings, and gardens where customers could stroll with the girl of their choice. Designed to replicate the safety and comfort of the home, such maisons provided customers with what was intended to be a sexually-charged domestic space—a concept that was antithetical to the definition of an idealized bourgeois home. Working-class establishments on the other hand lacked the amenities of more successful maisons and were little better than kennels where prostitutes were forced to share flea-infested beds.¹²¹ A lack of privacy was an issue that all prostitutes in maisons had to cope with for they were under constant surveillance by government inspectors or the dame de maison who oversaw its operation and implemented the logic of the

¹²¹ Fiaux, Louis. *Les maisons de tolerance : Leur fermeture*. (Paris, G. Carree, 1892. 30) Gallica Bibliotheque Numerique, accessed April 19, 2011, www.gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k61809r

regulation system within. Each maison was conducted as one would a business. Its workers were recruited by a procuress; monthly health examinations were conducted by doctors either within the maison or at a dispensary; and an account was opened between the prostitute and the keeper to record debts and wages. In return for the room and board she granted her employees, a *dame de maison* pocketed a large portion of the prostitute's earnings. Her alliance with the *bureau des mœurs* worked in her favor for if a prostitute attempted to leave a maison while she still owed money, the police would force her to return.

The engraving above which appeared in an 1843 book of illustrations depicting scenes of Parisian street life portrays an encounter between an unregistered prostitute and a potential customer that could have taken place on any Parisian street unsupervised by the *Bureau des Mœurs*.¹²² Outside the confines of the *maison de tolerance*, the prostitute who approached male passers-by could appear as a woman merely asking for directions or assistance. Her placement within an enclosed milieu however, not only protected public morals but weakened the temptation that men faced on a daily basis whenever they encountered this figure in the public domain. Men need not worry that in traversing darkened alleyways or narrow streets they warranted solicitation and jeopardized their moral well-being. Out of sight, out of mind, prostitution was a temptation that was more easily avoided. Rather than having to resist the lure of a young prostitute, thanks to the provisions of regulation, men were instead approached by an older woman called *la bonne* whose job was to convince passers-by to enter the *maison de tolerance*. Customers who decided to procure the services of a *fille de maison* had to go through a process that resembled one seen in a modern day penitentiary system. Led towards the maison by

¹²² Image removed due to copyright violation. See Gavarni, Daumier, and Celestin Nanteuil. *Illustrations de les rues de Paris ancien et moderne. 1358-1848, origine et histoire*. (Paris: G. Kugelmann, 1843) Gallica Bibliothèque nationale de France. Accessed April 7, 2011, www.gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k61809r

la bonne, they had to pass through two sets of doors and once inside were required to inscribe their name on a ledger that was later reviewed by a police official—a procedure that allowed the bureau des mœurs to evaluate the types of men who visited maisons de tolerance. Although they were not required to register with the police or undergo medical examinations, males who engaged the services of a *fille de maison* thus placed themselves under the observation of this thorough administration. In districts where surveillance was lax, maisons de tolerance lost business to the unregistered prostitute whose customers could avoid detection by the Bureau de Mœurs.

What was life like for a *fille de maison*? Why would she place herself under the control of such a restrictive system? There are few first-hand testimonies by prostitutes who submitted themselves to stricture by the Bureau des Mœurs. What little extant documents available are written by higher class prostitutes outside the control of regulation—those who as courtesans or kept women experienced a lifestyle quite different from that of the *fille publique*. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, a wealth of information written by administrative officials—social scientists, policemen, and physicians-- exists on the subject. Considering that she was required by the dame de maison to serve any customer who desired her services, life for a *fille de maison* could be harsher than that of a prostitute outside its confines. In his work that advocated the closure of France's maisons de tolerances, Dr. Fiaux writes that the average *fille de maison* in a Parisian establishment saw seven to eight clients a day—a high number in light of a statistic that estimates two to five for a street prostitute.¹²³ One plausible reason a prostitute might enter a maison de tolerance was the protection it offered from the numbing cold and bitter winds that characterized Parisian winters. A loss of privacy was after all a more attractive option than

¹²³ Fiaux, Dr. L. *Les maisons de tolerance : Leur fermeture*, 130

freezing on a park bench. Additionally, the maisons de tolerances provided a prostitute with regular meals and the companionship of other women in her situation. Parent-Duchâtelet suggests another explanation in *De la Prostitution*, noting the leisurely lifestyle a *fille de maison* led. A prostitute would usually rise in the early afternoon, and once her makeup was applied and she was properly clothed, she passed time not spent with a customer in the pursuit of recreational activities such as card games, music, or reading.¹²⁴ When choosing whether to present herself for inscription or not, a woman thus had two options: at the cost of her liberty she could live comfortably as a caged bird in a maison de tolerance; or she could risk the consequences that came with working as a clandestine prostitute.

In the attempt to limit the spread of venereal disease was attributed to clandestine prostitution, the regime des mœurs was especially harsh in their treatment of women suspected of working as unregistered prostitutes. The arbitrary nature of the judicial process was another aspect of regulation that curtailed the freedom of a prostitute. In the latter half of the century, critiques of regulation such as Victor Auganeur, the author of a book against the regime des mœurs decried its transgression of natural rights all French citizens were supposed to enjoy : “*Ces femmes hors de la loi, réduites à l’esclavage ont donc commis quelque crime ? un crime plus grand que tous les crimes, puisque pour aucun d’eux l’accusé n’est soustrait à ses juges naturels, privé des garanties que la loi assure à tous ?*”¹²⁵ Auganeur’s use of slavery as a metaphor to describe the judicial process is perhaps overdone, but he makes a valid point that prostitutes were deprived of judicial rights granted to other members of society. For once a woman was arrested and presented for trial her fate was not dependent on the decision of a jury,

¹²⁴ Parent-Duchatelet, *La Prostitution à Paris au XIXe siècle*, 100

¹²⁵ Auganeur, Victor. *Contre la police des mœurs, critiques et rapports*. (Paris : E. Cornély, 1904)

but rather on the report of the officer who had taken her into custody and the commissaire who transcribed her statement.¹²⁶ If found guilty by the chief of the Bureau des Moeurs, she was forcibly inscribed and examined for disease by a physician, and in cases of repeated arrest, sent to Saint-Lazare or the Petite Force. The patriarchal structure of this judicial process ultimately placed women suspected of prostitution outside the legal system by treating them differently from other criminals. Most women failed to convince the police of their innocence and few were successful in reversing a guilty verdict. Even if she was innocent, it was better not to request an appeal given that the commission rarely reversed a conviction and often increased the sentence initially proposed by the superintendent.¹²⁷ Thus, it was not uncommon for a woman whose only crime was the transgression of sexual etiquette to be inscribed as a prostitute—a circumstance indicative of the repressive mechanisms that the regulation system employed.

The procedures detailing the arrest and inscription of women suspected of clandestine prostitution also exemplify the inordinate authority granted to the bureau de mœurs in judging what qualified as sexually deviant behavior.¹²⁸ An 1843 regulation stated that a woman could only be arrested by an agent de mœurs in the following conditions: if she was followed into a maison de tolerance or into the home of another prostitute; if she was apprehended leaving a maison or walking with known prostitutes; if she was observed soliciting; denounced by her neighbours as a *fille insoumise*; or if after a period of prolonged surveillance she was accused of prostitution by an agent of the bureau.¹²⁹ Once taken into police custody, there were negative consequences regardless of the bureau's verdict. Simply the fact that she had been arrested was

¹²⁶ Harsin, *Policing Prostitution*, 9

¹²⁷ Corbin, *Women for Hire*, 10

¹²⁸ Harsin, 9

¹²⁹ Harsin, 32

enough to tarnish a woman's reputation and affect her family's social standing.¹³⁰ The emphasis accorded to a woman's reputation, social conduct, and the social status of her acquaintances underlines the extent to which the period's moral and social climate influenced an agent's choice to arrest a woman. According to this logic, it was unconceivable that someone of decent character would jeopardize their social status and virtue by consorting with prostitutes, or behave in such a manner that they would be mistaken for one. The *fille independante* or unregistered prostitute thus had a complex task at hand if she wished to avoid arrest—her behavior not only had to indicate her sexual availability to potential customers, but appear inoffensive to agents de mœurs.

A survey of police memoirs from 1820-1830 describing actions that warranted arrest for public prostitution includes the following:

- “When after 11:00pm they are found in the streets, cabarets, etc.
- If they are found at dusk in the courtyard or the garden of the Tuileries, or near the Tuileries, or in the courtyard of the Louvre
- If they partake in any kind of riot
- If they insult passers-by in a public place
- If they walk by or stand on the place Vendome, the boulevard des Capucines, the place des Victoires, the place du Palais Royal, the place Louis XV, in the Luxembourg gardens, near the Luxembourg gardens, in the church and the place Sainte-Genevieve, and on the Champs Elysees.
- When they are found at any time of the bridges, quais, the public places, in the taverns near the Palais de Justice, and finally when they exercise their métier on the streets.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ The extent to which arrest affected one's social standing depended on the class of the woman accused of clandestine prostitution. The higher on the social ladder a woman was, the more her family's reputation was affected by her arrest.

¹³¹ Found in Jill Harsin's study of prostitution, an 1820 memoir, 53

The list of conditions that led to a prostitute's arrest serves as a valuable example of the elitist ideas concerning national, class, and sexual identity that influenced when and where the Bureau des Moeurs chose to exercise their power. Why were the place du Palais Royal, the boulevard des Capuchines, and other locations mentioned of such concern to authorities? It should be noted that the majority of the sites mentioned were national landmarks . The place Vendome, the Palais Royal, the Louvre, the Tuileries, the Luxembourg gardens, and the place Sainte-Genevieve were all royal palaces or gardens viewed as symbolic of French national identity. With their lush foliage, rows of striking statues, and colossal fountains, these were sites constructed by monarchs to stand as testaments to the glory and power of France. And as popular tourist sites, it was therefore necessary that they were unassociated with the vice of prostitution.

In addition to protecting visitors from moral contagion, the exclusion of prostitutes from these sites also upheld values that inspired the restructurization of Paris—a venture initiated by Louis XIV and continued throughout the nineteenth century despite several regime changes. The violence and radical upheavals of France's political revolutions had captured the world's attention, encouraging conceptions of France as a nation perturbed by social and political disorder.— a reputation that the French government hoped to amend through the renovation of its capital city. Architects and engineers thus sought to transform Paris' web of narrow streets and crowded neighborhoods into a vision of meticulously planned out boulevards and quartiers emblematic of the nation's veneration of visual and social order. During the Second Empire, the changes made to city's geographical landscape became even more extensive as a result of the vision of architect Baron Haussman. At a faster rate, new forms of industry and urban renovations began to replace the old neighborhoods and spaces of medieval Paris. Haussmann's transmogrification of Parisian public space created a new, rational order that reinforced the

bourgeois values they were founded upon. The expansive city parks built during the Second Empire became the drawing rooms of the public sphere, giving middle class families the opportunity to flaunt what was modern and prosperous in their lives. In these parks, women upheld the social roles they played in the home.

As seen in *The Champs-Élysées during the Paris Fair of 1867* by Renoir, parks represented a form of public space that had become overtaken by bourgeois domestic life. Among the painting's wide green spaces can be seen some thirty men, women and, children. The center of the painting is dominated by small familial groupings: children playing, families walking, and groups of women relaxing in the shade. All are neatly dressed and appear to be respectable members of middle class society; the exceptions would be a gardener and a pair of soldiers at the bottom right of the painting. Yet their presence too, upholds the bourgeois values of visual and social order; the gardener's purpose is to maintain the aesthetic beauty of the park while the soldiers maintain its tranquility; thus their presence among the park's other occupants is validated. To the far left of the painting flies a French flag, seemingly linking this portrayal of social equilibrium with France's national identity.

Along with the national landmarks mentioned in the police memoirs, the public spaces of Second Empire Paris were off-limits to those discordant with the city's new image. Prostitutes and other social undesirables thus had no place amid the spacious, structured boulevards, and scenic city parks which were intended for use by respectable members of society. The preoccupation with presenting a culture representative of France's prosperity proved to be a crucial factor in the Bureau de Moeurs treatment of women suspected of prostitution. Arrests were more frequent in areas such as the Champs-Élysées where alongside the middle-class

families and men who walked its tree-lined sidewalks, the prostitute was highly conspicuous and represented a threat to the moral and physical health of other pedestrians. The flawed structure of the regulation system made it possible for a woman to be falsely accused of prostitution if her actions did not conform to the image of respectability held by police agents. As a result, it was impossible to know how many women were actually guilty of clandestine prostitution and how many were merely victims of an overzealous police force.

Statistics in De la Prostitution and Felix Carlier's "Etude statistique sur la prostitution clandestine a Paris" show that in 1816, 412 women were arrested as *insoumises*,.¹³² By 1855 this figure had more than doubled to 1,323. Notably, the highest percentage of women diagnosed with syphilis was 49% in 1826, and despite the fact that on average only 27% of women from 1816-1869 were found to be infected, the number of arrests made each year continued to increase as the century progressed. By 1899 2,456 had been taken into police custody and subjected to medical examination.¹³³ The discrepancy between the number of women arrested as *insoumises* and those who were syphilitic suggests that most women were either clandestine prostitutes free from disease or women who had been mistakenly identified as prostitutes. Given that the primary intent of regulation was the prevention of syphilis and most women examined by doctors were found to be healthy, why was there a steady increase in the number of arrests made as the century progressed?

Once again, the period's obsession with classification and categorization provides a basis for understanding this trend. Along with other texts that emerged during the nineteenth century, Parent-Duchâtelet's study which cast the prostitute as indefinable by nature fuelled the *bureau de moeur*'s preoccupation for distinguishing clandestine prostitutes from normal members of

¹³² Parent-Duchâtelet. *De la Prostitution dans la ville de Paris*. 2 vols. 2d ed. (Paris : J-B, Balliere, 1836), 1857

¹³³ Felix Carlier, "Etude statistique sur la prostitution clandestine a Paris," found in Harsin, 268

society. Combined with the new spatial subdivisions that increased the visibility of individuals incompatible with the reigning norms of respectability this circumstance encouraged agents de mœurs to see prostitutes everywhere and supplies one possible reason for the increase in the number of arrests. The vast majority of women arrested by officers for unregistered prostitution were of the working class—a fact that reveals the extent to which bourgeois norms had been internalized by the bureau des mœurs as well as the association between the lower classes and sexual immorality.

Bourgeois ideology stipulated that the proper place for wives and daughters was within the confines of the private home where they would be protected from the immorality of the public sphere. While it was perfectly acceptable for a man to wander the streets of Paris as a *flâneur*—a Baudelairean figure who moved through the city's public spaces, watching and making note of his fellow pedestrians but remaining unnoticed himself-- the concept of a female *flâneuse* was one that was impossible . Due to gender norms that denied women unlimited access to urban space, decent women could not walk unaccompanied in the boulevards and parks of urban Paris. Although The Champs-Élysées during the Paris Fair of 1867 depicts several female figures, all are painted in the company of their family or other women. While middle-class women avoided the censure associated with appearing alone in public spaces by travelling in carriages or accompanied by friends, servants or family members, working class women did not have this luxury. The reality of their life did not afford for the possibility of paying for daily carriage rides. Furthermore, for women of this social group, economic necessity dictated that most family members work for a living— men of the laboring classes did not have enough leisure time to chaperone wives and daughters merely to protect their reputation. Thus working class women

often found themselves alone in Parisian public spaces—a circumstance which worked to their disadvantage since they could be mistaken for clandestine prostitutes.

The laws and social habits that regulated the distinction made between desirable and undesirable social groups exacerbated the autocratic behavior of the Bureau de Moeurs who sometimes failed to differentiate working-class women from prostitutes. The different types of prostitution classified in *De la Prostitution* conveyed to readers that the prostitute was not confined to the street or the brothel but also practiced her vice in pretext shops or cafes where her illicit trade was conducted in backrooms or basements—a revelation that heightened the association between working class women and sexual immorality. Due to the nature of her work which often required frequent contact with members of the opposite sex and her unaccompanied presence on city streets, it was the working-class woman who found herself suspected of clandestine prostitution by agents de mœurs. Jill Harsin describes the tendency for many writers of the period to advocate the surveillance of women who worked in places of public recreation such as cafes and restaurants.¹³⁴ One such writer, P.A Didiot, went even further and encouraged the observation of those who worked in shops, dress shops, glove stores, novelty shops, bookstores, and other establishments where women came into contact with unfamiliar men¹³⁵. Such recommendations provoked men to wonder if the overtly friendly barmaid was a *femme de café* or if the shop-girl behind the counter was sexually available when she indicated that other types of merchandise were available for purchase.¹³⁶

In *La police des mœurs en France et dans les principaux pays de l'Europe* Louis Fiaux decries the double discrimination that arrested women faced due to their social class and gender :

¹³⁴ Harsin 248

¹³⁵ As described in Harsin's book, 248

¹³⁶ Commenge, Dr. O. Recherche sur les maladies veneriennes a paris dans leurs rapports avec la prostitution clandestine....de 1878 à 1887. Paris, G. Masson, 189. 62

“La prostituée qui souffre est fille de peuple, elle a été le plus souvent jetée au ruisseau par la pauvreté, elle est passée de la tyrannie de la misère sous le despotisme des mœurs, qui donc s’intéressa à elle ? Elle n’appartient pas à la classe de ceux qui font ou applique les lois. Elle est loin, si loin d’eux !”¹³⁷

Given that most prostitutes were working-class women, the protection of their judicial rights was of even less value to an administrative force that was the brainchild of bourgeois officials. Fiaux defined regulation according to its despotic nature which gave the police the inordinate power to decide who was and who wasn’t a prostitute. As he further elaborates, *“La fantaisie de l’agent des mœurs fait d’une femme une prostituée, et quand cette femme est devenue officiellement une prostituée, la fantaisie de ce même agent l’envoie, quand il lui plait, innocente, en prison, ou la laisse, délinquante, en liberté.”*¹³⁸ Fiaux’s observation conveys how the gendered ideology of the period sexualized working class women, making those who wore indecent clothing or exhibited bold behavior into prostitutes liable to arrest by the bureau des mœurs. As antithetical to ideal conceptions of femininity, the figure of the prostitute and the working class woman, were therefore posited as potentially dangerous by the bureau de mœurs whose strategies of social control represented an attempt to codify public respectability rather than control the spread of venereal disease. Under constant observation, confined within the maison de tolerance, and denied judicial rights enjoyed by others, the prostitute found herself victimized by the repressive mechanisms of a system that combined the functions of modern disciplinary institutions that emerged during the nineteenth century with the condemning gaze of bourgeois ideology.

¹³⁷ Fiaux, *La police des mœurs en France et dans les principaux pays de l’Europe : Contre la police des mœurs, critiques et rapports*. xvi

¹³⁸ Fiaux, Louis. *La police des mœurs en France et dans les principaux pays de l’Europe : Contre la police des mœurs, critiques et rapports*. vi

A Modern Mechanism of Discipline

Surveillance and Control

The autocratic nature of the regulation system whose operation was modeled on the classification, surveillance, confinement, and reform of the prostitute make it an institution symptomatic of Foucault's construction of power exercised as discipline. Between her supervision by the *dame de maison*, government officials, physicians, and agents of the *bureau des mœurs*, the *fille de maison* found herself imprisoned in a version of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, "a new mode of obtaining power over mind".¹³⁹ The architectural structure of Bentham's panopticon whose design served as the template for the modern prison system, gave omnipotent visibility to authorities wishing to control prison populations. Depicted in the figure below, the panopticon was a circular building with a central tower from which a surveyor could see from all degrees the prison cells that occupied the circumference of the building. In this way, the panopticon would provide maximal surveillance with minimal effort from guards.

The nineteenth century enclosure system paralleled the ambition and function of Bentham's panopticon which had as its intent, "Morals reformed - health preserved - industry invigorated, instruction diffused - public burthens lightened - Economy seated, as it were, upon a rock ..."¹⁴⁰ The structure of the enclosure system also satisfies Foucault's definition of a disciplinary system as discussed in *Discipline and Punishment*: an enclosed space where all movements are supervised; where each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed; and whose knowledge is recorded..¹⁴¹ By concentrating prostitution in buildings easily recognizable as houses of vice, the *Bureau de Mœurs* was easily able to assess when *filles de maisons* entered and exited along with which men frequented the *maisons*. In its attempt

¹³⁹ Bentham, Jeremy. *The Panopticon Writings*. (London: Lincoln's Inn.) Accessed April 2011., <www.cartome.org/panopticon2.html

¹⁴⁰ Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings*

¹⁴¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment* 197

to confine the prostitute, the bureau de mœurs had extensive knowledge of her character and conduct—a consequence which according to Foucaultian logic enabled authorities to secretly shape an individual's behavior. Between the dispensary, maison de tolerance, and surveillance on city streets, the French regulation system established a total periphery of vision that allowed not only the containment of prostitutes but study of their persons. While conducting research, Parent Duchâtelet took advantage of the body of knowledge that this state of supervision produced, and in *De la Prostitution* states that his work would have been impossible without the cooperation of the Bureau des Mœurs who were in a position to easily furnish information on prostitutes and their customers: "Where the government of men is concerned, it is good to know their weaknesses and to use them in order to govern them."¹⁴² Parent-Duchâtelet's speculation illustrates an additional motivation of the of the enclosure system: observation and classification not merely to increase knowledge, but to supervise and control.¹⁴³

Exclusion and Subjugation

The nineteenth century preoccupation with cleansing public spaces of undesirables can be seen as a modern evocation of Jean Baptiste de La Salle's seventeenth century classroom design that would provide teachers with instant knowledge of individual progress and background. Baptiste de la Salle's spatial design would separate students according to their social background so "those whose parents are neglectful and verminous" were distinct from "those who are careful and clean."¹⁴⁴ The significance placed on when and where a prostitute could occupy public space turned her body into a site of power that was threatening to man and thus in need of regulation by the Bureau de Mœurs. Social anxiety concerning fear of moral contagion demanded that the

¹⁴² Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la Prostitution*. 109

¹⁴³ Corbin, 18

prostitute was continuously observed, contained within the maison de tolerance, and demeaned by the judicial processes of regulation.

Likewise, the same mechanisms of discipline and power that were exercised on the prostitute, also affected the general public as exemplified by the victimization of working class women on Parisian streets. As previously discussed, the bureau's mania for identifying clandestine prostitutes led to arrests of working class women whose only crime was their incompatibility with ideal conceptions of femininity. While working-class women were the victims of the Bureau's overzealous efforts, the lower-classes in general were made to feel unwelcome on the newly constructed boulevards that appeared during the Second Empire. Through the panoptic-like view that they offered their pedestrians, Parisian streets were agents of social conformity and social isolation. Due to the intrinsic relationship between traversing these spheres and public observation, those who failed to fit the societal norms which these boulevards engendered, often experienced feelings of alienation and discomfort.

In Emile Zola's *L'Assommoir*, we see the geographic, economic, and social polarization of the working and middle classes that arose from Haussmann's progressive vision of public space. Before their polarization, middle and working-class families had resided in the same neighborhoods, often living on top of one another in an ascending scale of poverty. This close proximity and encounters in staircases allowed for a certain kind of familiarity between the two groups. On the contrary, Haussmanization created a new form of social circulation in which the two groups rarely came in contact. Unable to afford the high rents that accompanied the renovation of Parisian neighborhoods, the working class was driven to the outskirts of Paris where they lived in slum-like conditions.

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 318

Amid their own streets, working-class members of society corresponded with local conceptions of normality but in nineteenth century bourgeois spheres, their presence only served to highlight their status as intruders. An example of the disconcertion they felt in these new arenas is exemplified in the narrative of *L'Assommoir*'s main character:

“This part of Paris made her feel quite cheap because it was becoming so grand, being opened up in all directions...lost in the crowds on the wide strip, Gervaise felt alone and abandoned. These vistas along distant avenues only emphasized her emptiness; and to think that out of this flood of folk, many of whom were quite comfortably off, not one Christian soul guessed at her plight and slipped ten sous into her hand!”¹⁴⁵

The emptiness that Gervaise experiences highlights the ability of these renovated Parisian spaces to act as a form of social segregation, alienating those who did not fit in with the image of its habitués. The comical episode in which the novel's main character and her wedding party traipse off to the Louvre conveys how ill at ease working class members were in the unfamiliar surroundings of bourgeois public space. As this muddy and motley crew makes their way across Paris' boulevards, passers-by ogle and laugh at the twelve strangers clad in an odd assortment of out-dated fashions. Describing the spectacle they make, Zola writes, “Against the wet, grey background of the boulevard and the milling crowds, the strung-out couples showed up as bright splotches of colour.”¹⁴⁶ Through their transgression of the geographic boundaries demarcating bourgeois space from that of the lower classes, the wedding party inadvertently becomes an amusing exhibition. The jeers and deprecations thrown at them by the street's other occupants illustrate the ability of the panoptic-like boulevards to reveal and discourage unorthodox behavior and dress.

¹⁴⁵ Zola, Emile. *L'Assommoir*, (New York; Penguin Books, 1970), 393

¹⁴⁶ Zola, *L'Assommoir*, 89

The philosophy behind Bentham's panopticon held that one is less likely to exhibit deviant behavior if one is unsure whether they are being observed or not.¹⁴⁷ "Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."¹⁴⁸ Aware of the fact that agents of the Bureau des Mœurs were on the lookout for women exhibiting sexually deviant behavior, women on Parisian streets were highly conscious of their actions in the public sphere. Never aware of when an agent was watching them, women were more inclined to conform to traditional gender norms lest they be wrongly identified as a *fille insoumise*. Thus, the French regulation system that emphasized constant surveillance of city streets also served to inhibit aberrations from bourgeois norms.

The enclosure system was a prime example of a regulatory institution that addressed three primary concerns of nineteenth century social reformers, medical experts, and moral commentators: the protection of morality, the treatment and prevention of venereal disease, and the control of deviant individuals. But at what cost? All to ensure the moral and physical health of the nation, « *Des milliers des femmes deviennent la chose de l'agent des mœurs, parce qu'elles passent pour commettre d'habitude, un acte inexécutable sans la collaboration de l'homme.* »¹⁴⁹ Regulation fashioned "a cruel, ingenious cage" that confined the prostitute and made her constant visibility a trap from which she could not escape. The regulatory system was not a perfectly functioning institution however. *Filles en carte* did escape the attention of the bureau de mœurs and the bureau was never successful in completely eliminating unregistered prostitution from France. Once a prostitute failed to show up for her medical examination three

¹⁴⁷ Bentham, Jeremy, *The Panopticon Writings*

¹⁴⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 201

¹⁴⁹ Fiaux, 5

months in a row, her name was taken off the register and she became a *fille disparue*—an example of regulations failure to maintain complete surveillance and control of the prostitute.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the enclosure system no longer had a place in French society. While Haussmanization had demolished the unhealthy quarters of old Paris and replaced them with more orderly streets and buildings, it had in the process destroyed many maisons de tolerance which were not rebuilt. Consequently, police surveillance of neighborhoods which had once housed these buildings decreased and as a result unregistered prostitution rose. The increase in competition from clandestine prostitution led to a loss in profits for owners of these establishments and many were forced to close their doors. The growth in feminist sentiment that developed during the latter half of the century also played a hand in regulation's demise. Rather than the laudatory approval they had bestowed on the bureau des mœurs during the early to mid-1900s, as exemplified in Fiaux's *La police des mœurs en France et dans les principaux pays de l'Europe* and Auganeur's *Contre la police des mœurs, critiques et rapports*, more writers began to criticize agents for the abuse of power they exercised over working-class women and prostitutes, and the violation of judicial rights that the system allowed. After 1874, there was a steady decrease in the number of maisons de tolerances operating in Parisian quarters and by the twentieth century the maison de tolerance had been replaced by brothels operating outside the control of the Bureau des Mœurs.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Corbin, 118

Chapter 3

“From Dirt comes Death”: Regulation and the Medical Profession

“Discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, and targets ...and it may be taken over by specialized institutions.”¹⁵¹

The surveillance and discipline of deviant populations did not take the same forms that they did in France. As discussed previously, the English police force was crippled by what little authority they were granted by the legislature. Unlike the Bureau de Moeurs, they could not forcibly detain or examine women suspected of clandestine prostitution because English law did not acknowledge the existence of prostitution as an industry. Nevertheless, despite the absence of an official regulatory system, English society did exercise power over the prostitute in a different manner—through the establishment of reformatory institutions meant to reform deviant women and the passage of the Contagious Disease Acts in the 1860s.

Beginning with reform institutions which emerged in the eighteenth century, this chapter will explore the ways that regulation was achieved in nineteenth century England. I will argue that though it lacked the hierarchical structure of the French system, the reform institution also functioned in panoptic ways by placing the prostitute under observation, ensuring her isolation and attempting to discipline and reshape her mind through indoctrination. While I will discuss the Contagious Disease Acts and their consequences, the second part of this chapter will mainly focus on physicians who were the most fervent supporters of the Acts. As I will illustrate, the

¹⁵¹ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punishment : The Birth of the Prison*. 2nd ed. (London :Vintage Books, 1995)

medical profession defined the prostitute in terms of her deviance from Victorian gender norms that conceptualized the ideal woman as asexual. Though it was a scientific discipline, medicine was inextricably linked to issues such as morality, culture and religion and it is this complex set of relationships which will be considered in this chapter. Through my presentation of the intersection of medicine and social ideology, I aim to portray how medical discourse pathologized not only prostitutes, but any woman whose life departed from middle-class norms.

Reformatory institutes were praised by Mayhew in *London Labour and the London Poor* for succeeding where penitentiary institutions often failed. Not only did they treat prostitutes for venereal disease, but most importantly, they attempted to save her from her ignominious condition and lead her back to a state of grace. The Society for the Reformation of Manners held that through such institutions, “the inbuilt moral sense of those who have fallen through weakness could be restored and refined by a program of training.”¹⁵² Homes for reformed prostitutes had existed since the Middle Ages in France and other Catholic countries. The structure of the reformatory institute was based on stereotypical constructions of the prostitute as a victim of circumstance who given the opportunity, would be only too willing to give up her sinful ways. Built in 1758, the Magdalene Hospital was the first English, non-Catholic version. Its name draws upon the biblical figure of Mary Magdalen—a purported prostitute who inspired by the Gospel of Christ, saw the error of her ways and devoted her life to serving him. The Magdalen Hospital adopted a humanitarian, compassionate view of the prostitute—conceptualizing her not as evil and debase, but as a “lost sheep of the flock” who required guidance. As this commentator described, “It may seem, indeed, somewhat wild to speak of

¹⁵² “Magdalen Hospital for the Reception of Penitent Prostitutes” *St. George-in-the-East-Church*. Accessed, April 7, 2011. www.stgite.org.uk/magdalenhospital.html

going out to fetch wanderers home, when so many of those who have already risen up like the prodigal, and are at the very door of the home of penitents, have none to lead them in; but we cannot entirely put out of sight the duty of searching for the lost sheep in the wilderness.”¹⁵³

With such a conscientious mission, the Magdalen Hospital appeared to be the quintessence of a benevolent institution. However, just like the French regulation system, this reformatory space satisfied Foucault’s definition of a disciplinary institution that implemented techniques of discipline and examination that allowed for the observation, treatment, and control of prostitutes. Prostitutes who wished to enter this facility were first required to submit a petition in which she confessed her sin and desire for salvation—a process that was intended to create awareness of her inferiority and need to be reformed into an acceptable model of femininity. Despite this demeaning requirement, applications for admittance to the Magdalen Hospital were abundant and only a few women gained admittance. Pregnant or diseased women were disqualified from entering the program but they could receive treatment for venereal disease at a hospital and henceforth could reply for admission. In 1817 the Reverend John Prince estimated that the average age of women in this institution was between 15-21 years of age.¹⁵⁴ Once inside reformatory institutions, prostitutes were subjected to a program of physical and moral disciplining that highlighted their distance from respectable women. Younger applicants had a better chance of being accepted into the hospital since it was believed that their youth would make them more impressionable and they would be more willing to conform to appropriate standards of behavior. Additionally, it was also believed that young prostitutes were less corrupted by the immorality associated with their trade. Once accepted into the program,

¹⁵³ “A Short Account of the London Magdalene Hospital. *Quarterly Review* 83 (1846) :359-378

¹⁵⁴ Nash, Stanley. “Prostitution and Charity: The Magdalen Hospital, a Case Study.” *Journal of Social History*, 619

prostitutes were indoctrinated with Christian bourgeois doctrine that valued the principle of industry and encouraged them to cultivate their virtue.

In 1817, the average length of time that a woman stayed within the confines of the Magdalen Hospital was twelve months.¹⁵⁵ In its day-to-day operations and appearance, the Magdalen Hospital more resembled a prison than an institution concerned with the religious salvation of women. As described by Stanley Nash who argues that this institution was a forerunner of the 19th century state prison, “Magdalen penitents were from their very first application to the charity, systematically stripped of their former identity through an enforced anonymity which included uniforms, the assignment of numbers rather than names to their petitions of admission and the substitution of new names after entrance into the refuge.”¹⁵⁶ When the hospital was first built, inmates were kept behind a lattice in view of visitors. Visiting the hospital to goggle at the fallen women was a popular spectator of London residents until its practice was discontinued in the nineteenth century. While it was called a hospital because it was designed to provide moral and physical therapy for the prostitute, the Magdalen Hospital likened their charges to prisoners, requiring that they comply with strict rules regarding appropriate conversation, diet, work and worship habits, and personal demeanour. Prostitutes were taught that one should not be idle but earn their bread by honest labor. As a consequence, they were given fixed hours of work where they were employed in spinning, knitting, household work, laundry, and manufacturing goods such as lace, silk gloves, shoes, and clothing. This was not only intended to improve their character and teach them the merits of bourgeois industry, but also to earn revenue for the hospital. Even when not working, the days of penitents were strictly regulated and they were assigned hours to sleep, eat and pray.

¹⁵⁵ Nash, 620

¹⁵⁶ Nash, 623

Blindness was a feature of life for women in reformatory institutions who were cut off from the wider world. Further enhancing the prison effect was the fact that wooden blinds covered the windows to keep women from looking out and being tempted by the material world—an effect that ensured their isolation from outside influences that could hinder their improvement. In its structural design, the Magdalen Hospital mirrored the concept behind Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, ensuring both the inmate's isolation and surveillance. Intended to facilitate self-reflection and prayer, women were housed in closed interior spaces in the form of separate beds surrounded by curtains—a construction that can be compared to the cells seen in Bentham's design for the Panopticon that encouraged occupants to conform to prison rules. The grounds of the hospital on the other hand gave doctors and guards the opportunity to scrutinize the conduct of the women—thus placing them under a process of surveillance comparable to that implemented by the regulation system in France.

In light of these features, the reformatory institution was not merely a facility concerned with the prostitute's salvation. The reform institution's attempt to morally discipline their charges was a form of social control that was also used by the French regulation system. Both institutions disciplined and shaped the minds of prostitutes; controlled her behavior, and placed her under constant surveillance. At the end of her time in the hospital, prostitutes were expected to continue the reformatory process through application of the proper, self-controlled feminine behavior that she had been taught.

The Contagious Disease Acts

The spread of venereal disease had always been a primary concern of English commentators on prostitution and advocates of reform yet despite an increase in publications urging its regulation, legislative action by politicians was not taken until the 1860s. What

prompted Parliament to relinquish the stance that prostitution was not a subject suitable for discussion by government officials? Government involvement was ultimately prompted by the danger venereal disease posed to national security. Since the 1820s there had been an increase in syphilis outbreaks among soldiers of the British army. Typically members of the lower-class, these men had little money and thus usually could only afford the services of prostitutes who stationed themselves outside military camps. These were the women whom Mayhew described as “paid murderesses, committing crime with impunity,” for they slept with several soldiers a night, spreading disease amongst them.¹⁵⁷ The publication of statistical data in the mid-nineteenth century alerted the public to the seriousness of this issue and led to several government inquiries.

Statistics in an 1864 edition of the *British Medical Journal* indicated that perhaps the greatest danger soldiers faced was not to be found on the battlefield, but within their own nation. In 1862, there were 7,000 admissions into hospitals of the 88,600 sailors of the Royal Navy. Even more alarming, in 1865, of the 68,000 admissions into hospital in the British home army of 73,000 men, 20,600 were for venereal diseases.¹⁵⁸ As one newspaper observed, “In a year an entire week of the services of the troops stationed in Britain was lost by diseases. Whereas in the Prussian Army the yearly admissions into hospitals of syphilitic cases were 62 in 1000, in the Belgian army 80 in 100, in the French 97 of 1000, in the English army such admissions amounted to 258 in 1000.”¹⁵⁹ Presented with such alarming figures, government officials decided that they could no longer ignore the threat posed by prostitution. Faced with the infection of their armed forces

¹⁵⁷ Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*. Vol. 4. Reprint. (London :August M. Kelley, 1967)

¹⁵⁸ Ker, Dr. C.B. “The Contagious Diseases Acts.” *The British Journal of Homeopathy* 28, 330

¹⁵⁹ Ker, “The Contagious Diseases Acts.” 352

the treatment of prostitutes became even harsher.—after all, Britain’s soldiers could not win glory for their country if they suffered from syphilitic sores and skin eruptions.

As a result of the ensuing panic that arose due to the endemic’s proliferation, in 1864, Parliament passed the first part of what became known as the Contagious Disease Acts. The Contagious Disease Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869 as outlined in the British and Foreign Medico-Churgical Review decreed that under the acts, the following would occur:

- “12 military and naval stations selected in which and within a five mile radius the Acts are to be in effect
- Hospital accommodation provided for diseased women
- Power is given to the superintendent of police to bring up before a justice any common prostitute resident in any place in which the Act applies; such justice is empowered to order her to be subject to a periodical examination by the visiting surgeon for a year
- A woman may voluntarily submit herself to this examination
- In the event of a woman being found diseased on examination, the visiting surgeon is directed to detain her and to place her in a hospital for treatment where she can be detained in legal custody until cured for a period of six months
- If discharged and found uncured and found to be soliciting customers once more, she is subject to imprisonment
- Any woman thinking herself aggrieved by detention, or wishing to be relieved from periodical examination on account of discontinuing prostitution, may apply to a justice for relief.
- Penalties can be inflicted upon an owner of a house if he knowingly allows a prostitute to conduct business there.”¹⁶⁰

Before the act was revised in 1866, it had included a portion of the bill stating, “Upon release the surgeon must give the woman a copy of a certificate validating that she is free from contagious disease.” Officials later removed this passage on the grounds that the certificate system would suggest that the Act legalized prostitution. However supporters of the Acts did not

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

consider government interference as sanctioning prostitution by providing soldiers with a healthy supply of prostitutes. Rather, they argued that the legislation had the moral and physical health of the nation in mind. English regulation was not to be confused with regulation in France which granted licenses to prostitutes. Proponents for government involvement argued that, The Contagious Disease Acts would establish not only the reduction of venereal disease, but the moral and social improvement of the prostitute. From the observation of Surgeon Major Johnstone of the Cork Lock Hospital, it appeared that the Acts had at least fulfilled the former expectation. According to his article published in the *British Journal of Homoeopathy*, doctors had reached a consensus that the disease had diminished greatly in severity—50% in the six months in which the Act had been in force-- and most importantly, the women were more cleanly and better behaved.¹⁶¹ The Report from the Royal Commission on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts, 1871, echoed this sentiment, pointing out that the decorous and wholesome improvement in the manners and habits of prostitutes were a direct result of expanded sanitary regulations.¹⁶² In light of these benefits, there was a desire from members of the medical profession to extend the Act's jurisdiction to the civilian population as well.

It is notable that the staunchest proponents of the Contagious Disease Acts and their extension were members of the medical profession who were dominant on all the Parliamentary investigations into the operation of the Acts between 1867 and 1881. Medical definitions used in the Contagious Disease Acts highlighted the threat that prostitutes represented—emphasizing the dangerous and unnatural nature of her sexuality. Although it was by definition a science that treated disease, medicine in the nineteenth century was inextricably tied to the moral and social

¹⁶¹ Ker, 333

¹⁶² Report from the Royal Commission on the Administration and Operation of the Contagious Diseases Acts 1866-69, 1871; General British Parliament Papers, 1871, XIX, 11

beliefs of its practitioners—the majority of whom were of the upper-middle class. Perhaps no other figure represents this blend of science with social ideology than William Acton—a specialist in venereology and medical consultant to the London Lock Hospital whose opinion was much consulted by government officials. Acton was a firm believer in regulation and argued that prostitution was an unpleasant, but necessary element of life as males had a physical need to resist sexual desire.

A native of Shillingstone where he was enrolled as a resident apprentice at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Acton moved to Paris in 1836 where he began working in the women's venereal hospital. By age twenty-seven when he returned to England he was well-known in the field of gynecology and was offered a place at the Royal College of Surgeons. Over the course of the next seventeen years, Acton wrote several publications on sexual organs and sexual intercourse. He is perhaps most known for his ideas concerning masturbation and sex. A proponent of the closed-body system which described the human body as possessing a finite amount of sexual energy in the form of semen, Acton argued that ejaculation took away from the body's store of energy, and thus masturbation was dangerous to one's health. Acton's publication of *Prostitution considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and other large cities; with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils* was an important addition to the new medical discourse on sexuality as demonstrated by one commentator who defined it as, "A most important paper on that great source of immorality of young women in London and elsewhere, which Mr. Acton has so justly, and without the slightest

exaggeration, described it.”—a description that conveys that the medical profession’s attention to moral and social issues was not surprising at all to the nineteenth century public.¹⁶³

Although they were men of science, physicians propagated the prevailing ideologies of their time through their sexual discourse. In *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, Frank Mort describes the definition of sex by the medical profession as one that was based on the juxtapositions between: physical health/non-health, virtue/vice, cleanliness/filth, morality/depravity, and civilization/animality.¹⁶⁴ Like the discourses of social investigators and moral commentators, medical texts did not exist in a vacuum but reflected the class-consciousness and social beliefs of their writers. In Acton’s case, his discourse and opinions had the same effect as the Contagious Disease Acts, serving to classify deviant individuals as antithetical to conceptions of normality. In his defense of the Contagious Disease Acts before the Association of the Medical Officers of Health in 1869, Acton’s definition of the prostitute places her outside the bounds of femininity; according to his derogatory language, the prostitute is not even a proper woman: “The public needed to be made aware that prostitutes were not soiled doves, but were a class of women who were almost unsexed and had lost all womanly feeling, consorting with as many as eight to twelve different men in the same night...”¹⁶⁵ “Several aspects of this construction of the prostitute are significant. First it indicates that the public is unaware of the true nature of the prostitute—information that they “needed to be made aware of.” Secondly, Acton rejects the conception of the prostitute as a fallen woman. His

¹⁶³ "Prostitution Considered in its Moral..." *The Lancet London: a journal of British and foreign medicine....volume 2*: (London: Thomas Palmer, Lovell. 1857), 513. Google Books.

¹⁶⁴ Mort, 41

¹⁶⁵ Association of Medical Officers of Health", *British Medical Journal* 1 (January 8, 1870), .35

assertion that she belonged in a separate class from other women indicates his reasoning for this refutation. The euphemism of the prostitute as a fallen woman is one that allows for her reformation and assumes that given the opportunity, she can once again exhibit the virtuous qualities that had been worn away by the unpleasant nature of her trade. Acton's construction of the prostitute however, denies that she can ever was, or ever can be a respectable woman; the prostitute is defined as a woman who bore little relation to others of her sex. Acton's conception of the prostitute is one that construes her as inherently depraved and licentious; a woman who chooses to follow this indecent path out of inclination and a vile nature rather than out of necessity.

Acton's opinion is based on a prevalent medical theory of the 1850s and 1860s that defined women as naturally lacking in sexual desire. According to his description in his publication *Functions and Disorders*, motherhood, marriage, and domesticity were basic female instincts and the energy expended in breastfeeding and maternity negated any sexual desire that she might feel. Seen in this context, the prostitute, who took pleasure in sexual intercourse and made a living from it was in opposition to this version of femininity—circumstance which denoted her as unhealthy, impure, immoral, and related more to an animal than normal women.

The fact that Acton had worked in Paris at the women's venereal hospital undoubtedly shaped his condemnatory opinion of the prostitute. A doctor at this hospital, Acton's impression of prostitutes would have been those whom he treated—the women whose bodies had begun to show the signs of disease. These were not women who could be compared to other French women; normal women who conformed to gender norms did not suffer from venereal disease. If the only prostitutes that Acton came into contact with were sick, it is not surprising that his

conception of the prostitute was so biased. As all physicians in hospitals and dispensaries were under the same administrative system as the Bureau de Moeurs, Acton would have worked for a system whose definition of the prostitute was in opposition to the image of middle-class femininity. Seen in this context, his description of the prostitute as “not even a proper woman” perhaps stems from his exposure to such discriminatory attitudes and women who confirmed stereotypes of the prostitute as diseased and a danger to public health.

Louis Fiaux, the outspoken critic of the Bureau de Moeurs, made no distinction between physicians like Acton and the police agents who enforce regulation in France—stating that “*Le medicin est quelquefois homme de police.*”¹⁶⁶ To Fiaux, both professions victimized women who didn’t conform to conceptions of appropriate behavior—one through her forced examination and the other through her forced inscription; and both viewed the prostitute as a threat to public order and health. Fiaux’s assertion is perhaps justified by sentiments expressed by physicians such as Dr. William Burke who excused the mistakes of police officers who wrongly accused women of prostitution, arguing that this was no reason for regulation’s discontinuance given that “the laws against murder, arson, and theft are not repealed because the police blunder occasionally in putting them in force, nor even when judge and jury condemn the innocent to punishment. The fact is that the poor policeman is fallible, and a sinner, like other mortals, and so now and then sins and errs. It is too much to expect perfection and infallibility from him.”¹⁶⁷ Dr. Burke’s rationale is based on the same double standard that allowed men to have sex outside of marriage but condemned women for doing the same. While the policeman is granted forgiveness for his transgression, the prostitute on the other hand is denounced and becomes denied a voice, “That a demoralized woman, as a prostitute must be considered, can be demoralized still further, as is

¹⁶⁶ Fiaux, xvi

¹⁶⁷ Ker, 341 bmj

said by this examination, which she knows has for its object the detection and cure of a disease, can scarcely be argued.”¹⁶⁸ Dr. Burke’s logic aligns with Acton’s theory that prostitution was a physical and psychological stated. Her frequent exposure to the immorality and vice associated with public sexuality had desensitized her to the point where she lacked the emotional capacities of the nurturing mother or self-less daughter—ideal images of bourgeois femininity.

In England many doctors applauded police efforts to suppress prostitution under the Contagious Disease Acts and argued for the Act’s extension to nationwide program that would inspect and detain prostitutes. Not surprisingly, the rationale for increased regulation followed closely that employed by advocates of regulationists in France. Public fear and anxiety about prostitution were fuelled by medical opinions which constructed the prostitute as a potent threat to public safety. As one physician wrote in the *British Journal of Homeopathy*, “A woman with so contagious a disease as syphilis is dangerous to the community, and must be prevented by every legitimate means from spreading it, even by the means adopted by the Act.”¹⁶⁹ Medicine thus had a hand in bringing the prostitute into the sphere of state control. Like the French regulation system, the Contagious Disease Acts gave police the power to bring women suspected of prostitution into custody and granted physicians the authority to detain a prostitute if she was found to be diseased. For medical men such as Acton as well as police authorities, prostitution was not a career but a state of being.

Mr. Jacob Bright, a parliamentary representative known for his support of women’s rights was an outspoken critic of the arbitrary power the Acts gave men over women. Bright’s

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ Ker, 345

denunciation of this legislation describes a system made possible by the gendered ideology of those in power: “These police have the power to place upon a public register every woman supposed to be a common prostitute and to compel her fortnightly or at such times as the authorities may fix upon, to subject herself to instrumental violation.”¹⁷⁰ As expressed by Jacob Bright, there was nothing to show at what particular stage in vice a woman became a common prostitute. The secret police, therefore had to determine this question themselves without the aid of Parliament.”¹⁷¹ How did the police resolve this issue? It appears that they adopted the same measures that the Bureau de Moeurs implemented—discriminating against women at the bottom of the social ladder. It was the working-class prostitute who was essentially targeted by legislation regarding prostitution in England—a circumstance that justified Bright’s fears that respectable women would be treated like prostitutes merely because their appearance or behavior was not in alignment with what a policeman considered to be respectable.¹⁷² In this milieu, sexuality and medicine were clearly linked in ways that promoted the need for moral control of women who didn’t conform to the model of the asexual female.

Discourses were a social practice that had powerful effect, regulating and normalizing feminine behavior, and defining what is normal and abnormal in the public sphere, legitimizing state and medical authority, produced “truths” that were taken as reality and classified women as normal or abnormal. In the physicians’ mind, the feminine sex was defined as one that negated all association with sex and passion. By constituting the prostitute as other, as pathological and perverse, medical discourse thus validated the forcible examination and detention of the prostitute in utter disregard of the woman’s objections. As exemplified by the figure of William Acton, doctors replicated the stereotypical beliefs of their class in their sexual discourse.

¹⁷⁰ Hansard, 1523

¹⁷¹ Hansard, 1523

¹⁷² Fiaux, xvi

Medical authority also asserted the need for moral control of such women and focused on stereotypes of the prostitute as impure and depraved to achieve their goal. Their language was absolute and generally conservative, and example of the attempt to codify public respectability and define sexuality rather than illustrate actual behavior.

Conclusion

"Heart of London, there is a moral in they every stroke! As I look on at the indomitable workings, which neither death, nor press of life, nor grief, nor gladness out of doors will influence one jot, I seem to hear a voice within thee which sinks into my heart, bidding me, as I elbow my way among the crowd, have some thought for the meanest wretch that passes, and being a man, to turn away with scorn and pride from the human shape. "¹⁷³

London presses on despite these unpredictable changes to her nature. Change is the essence of the city which is continually in a state of ebb and flow. But despite her chameleon-like nature, the city is an entity that will remain immortal while the men and women who people her streets will die and turn to dust before she ever falls. Master Humphrey's entreaty parallels sentiments expressed in literature of the time regarding prostitution in the public sphere. The goal of the discourses discussed in this study was not to intentionally widen the chasm between members of the lower classes and upper classes, but to elicit sympathy and to strengthen the ties of brotherhood. Nevertheless the information conveyed to readers in these texts had an unexpected effect, exacerbating the association of the working-class with dirt and disease. As the sentimental Mr. Humphrey cries, the human shape is no longer recognizable in that of their passersby. The nineteenth century medical discourse and English legislation targeting working-class prostitutes ultimately heightened the association of the lower-classes with the stigma of disease and contagion. Under the Contagious Disease Acts and French Regulation, policemen

¹⁷³ Dickens, Charles. *Master Humphrey's Clock*. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840), 82

acted upon these associations—often mistaking working-class women for prostitutes. Through her construction in medical discourse as antithetical to all that femininity stood for, the prostitute had been assigned a dangerous identity that put her at odds with the reigning social and gender norms; she had been fashioned into a character no longer recognizable to the human shape.

Conclusion

“The English community has come to regard public discussion and agitation as indispensable in the promotion of any reform, of whatever kind: and if you, Sir, have had lately time to even cursorily read the public papers, you will see that the great social evil has become one of the questions of the day, which cannot any longer be shirked. But a few weeks ago I was met by the reply, that this subject, prostitution, did not admit of discussion; and yet to-day no less than two leading articles, and several letters have appeared in public journals, thus most satisfactorily proving the interest taken in the subject by the press of this country...”William Acton, *Prostitution*, 1858¹⁷⁴

Acton’s observation that public discussion of prostitution was indispensable to the promotion of reform provides evidence of the evolution of attitudes regarding the propriety of sexual discussion in the public sphere. At the beginning of the century, other than religious treatises that constructed the prostitute as a woman fallen from grace into the clutches of temptation or a modern day Jezebel who led men astray, with the exception of *A Treatise on the Metropolis of the Police*, there existed few publications that investigated prostitution as thoroughly as those that appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. As William Acton conveys, “this great social evil” had become the locus of anxieties concerning the violation of social, gender, and sexual identities.

Why, at this particular moment in history was there such concern about prostitution? An increase in anxiety concerning the prostitute emerged at the same time as rapid changes to urban cities that unsettled many of their residents who were unsure of how to navigate new urban spaces created in the wake of city renovations. Bourgeois conceptions of femininity decreed that

¹⁷⁴ Acton, William. “Prostitution considered in its Moral, Social, and Sanitary Aspects in London and other large cities; with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils.” *Leader: A Political and Literary Review* 9.415 (1858): 240

women should remain within the boundaries of the private sphere where their fragile nature would be protected from the immorality and vice that one could encounter on city streets. However the creation of new public spaces such the shopping districts that appeared during the 1850s presented a challenge to this notion. As described by Erica Rappaport, for the first time, women began to venture out alone into districts that during the earlier part of the century, had been construed as the haunt of prostitutes. No longer accompanied by male relations, chaperons, or servants, women of the respectable class began to assert their presence in what was construed as a masculine, public arena—essentially challenging conceptions of gender, power, and the public sphere.¹⁷⁵

While women enjoyed the new liberty afforded to them, men were unsure over how to react to the increasing presence of women on city streets. While the unaccompanied woman had automatically been assumed to be a lady of easy virtue, now an unaccompanied woman could be an uprighteous mother or daughter. Combined with the message portrayed in nineteenth century discourses-- that the majority of prostitutes did not conform to stereotypical images—how were men to tell the difference between a prostitute and a respectable woman? This issue is encapsulated in the illustration presented below, found in an 1860 issue of Punch Magazine:

¹⁷⁵ Rappaport, Erica. *Shopping for Pleasure*, 10



176

This representation of middle-class women reflects a consequence that many faced as a result of the difficulty men had in telling who was, and who wasn't a prostitute. Both Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones express their annoyance with the fact that a lady cannot walk by herself on city streets without arousing the inappropriate attention of men. Mrs. Robinson however, has never experienced such an occurrence—a circumstance that is explained when one examines her appearance in contrast to those of the other two women. This cartoon, meant to criticize women like Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Brown who rather than donning the demure clothing of Mrs. Robinson, choose to dress in bold, eye-catching dresses that display their ankles and make their presence in the public sphere highly noticeable. Given that sexual identity during the nineteenth century was

¹⁷⁶ Punch (1860), 234

based on appearance and recognition, women who dressed in such a manner could be mistaken for dress lodgers or other kinds of prostitutes.

The possibility of mistaking a respectable woman for a prostitute—an event that was embarrassing for both the male and female involved—heightened anxiety regarding the identification and classification of women who did operate outside the strictures of acceptable sexual norms and was one factor that led to the proliferation of investigative publications on the nature of urban prostitution. Furthermore, this cartoon illustrates that the definition and categorization of what constituted acceptable femininity as well as transgressive feminine behavior was never stable but rather influenced by a confluence of various social, economic, and cultural shifts. Prostitution, as conveyed by the predicament of Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Jones, was a state that could define any woman who failed to conform to the bourgeois code of morality.

Contrary to the vagueness that marked this type of encounter on city streets, discourses on sexual identity allowed nineteenth century society to be displayed on a spectrum that defined abnormal sexual behavior as well as demarcated levels of deviancy—from the prima donna who in appearance seemed to belong to the aristocracy to the lowest-of-the low—the clandestine prostitute who infected soldiers and family men with venereal disease. As stated by Lynda Nead, “prostitution was not perceived as a homogenous category; there were differences within the group, grades of deviancy which could be regulated and order.” Authoritative discourses claimed to be transparent in nature—professing to be no more than the result of analytical investigations that threw light upon moral and religious conditions.¹⁷⁷ It was this emphasis on objectivity and accuracy that made gave such discourses the power to define and shape public conceptions of

¹⁷⁷ Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, xi

sexuality. The hard, cold, facts presented by social scientists and members of the medical community in the form of statistics, tables, and charts were ultimately more convincing than the moral admonitions found in earlier literature of the period. Inexpensive and published by well-known journalists such as Henry Mayhew, these discourses would have been easily available to middle-class audiences and thus would have had an even greater chance to influence their understanding of this subject.¹⁷⁸

The compelling force of such discourses serves as a discursive version of Bentham's Panopticon. Among their pages, professed knowledge about the prostitute was displayed in a manner that allowed readers to observe the multifarious forms that her deviant sexuality assumed. As a form of power exercised over a potentially threatening figure, the information found in these texts fuelled arguments that promoted the prostitute's regulation and social control. A letter to the editor of *The Times*, praises the French system as a means of taming unruly prostitutes who pose a danger to the public welfare, "In most of the continental states women of this description are under better management, both as respects their own comforts and the morals of others. Instead of being allowed to make their market amidst our wives and daughters at the theatres, and to interrupt passengers in the most public streets, they are located in districts where the evil of their residence is least felt, and are thus placed more immediately under the control of the police authorities."¹⁷⁹ The language used in this excerpt not only reflects the period's obsession with order, but also evokes the trope of prostitution as a legitimate business that like other industries, required rules and regulations to prescribe acceptable and unacceptable practices, supervise the behavior of workers, protect the rights of customers, and demarcate specific districts where trade should be conducted.

¹⁷⁸ Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 155

¹⁷⁹ "Prostitutes and Policemen. *The Times*. 21 October 1846. Pg 5. Issue 19373

Organization of the regulation system was designed to grant a panoptic-like view to its authorities who aimed to increase the system's effectiveness through the knowledge gained from their observations. The different forms of regulation that appeared in England and France encompassed the Foucaultian construction of the Panopticon as "a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behavior, to train or correct individuals; to experiment with medicines and monitor their effects; and to try out different punishments on prisoners, according to their crimes and character."¹⁸⁰ Under the French regulatory system, the *fille en carte* was under constant surveillance and the information drawn from the panoptic-like vision of the Bureau des Moeurs was later replicated in investigative studies such as Parent-Duchâtelet's *De la Prostitution*. Across the Channel, advocates of reform employed the compendium of knowledge comprised by their social investigators and medical experts to arouse public sentiment and promote desire for legislation regarding prostitution—an effort that came to fruition with the passage of the Contagious Disease Acts.

Authoritative discourses in the mid-nineteenth century emerged from a configuration of bourgeois conceptions of proper female behavior, the unresolved tensions between classes in the public sphere, and apprehension over the rapid social and spatial subdivisions that accompanied urbanization. Different historical moments saw the prevalence of different approaches taken, whether it was through the moral counsel of religious pamphlets, or as occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, through the methodological approach implemented by medical journals and social surveys. What I have aimed to show in this study is how sexual discourse of this period was organized around definitions of normality and deviancy, the understanding of what

¹⁸⁰ Foucault, 203-204

constitutes respectability, and the distinctions made between acceptable and unacceptable sexual behavior.

From a historical perspective, it has become evident that certain social and cultural systems at different points in time encourage or promote social control for different reasons and purposes. At the particular period that witnessed an outpouring of literature concerning sexuality, the prostitute was the focus of commentators who called for the control of social undesirables who were seen as a threat to public morals and safety. Has our view of prostitution changed? Prostitution is no longer a focus for cultural anxieties; in the twenty-first century she is no longer accused of corrupting the morals of society. The prostitute has disappeared; her footsteps have faded from public awareness and once more she has receded into the shadows. From the lack of controversy surrounding this individual, it would appear that society has evolved in its treatment of women who engage in this trade. But to deem our society improved in its treatment of deviance would be to jump to too hasty of a conclusion.

The prostitute has receded from the public eye, but merely to be replaced by other stigmatized individuals perceived as a threat to reigning social, sexual, and gender norms. As a minority group, homosexuals are conceived by many as immoral and threatening to public morals. As Lynda Nead discusses in *Myths of Sexuality*, the 1980s saw a wave of concern over the spread of HIV and AIDS—a disease that devastated populations not only in third world countries, but more developed ones as well. As Nead argues, AIDS was the syphilis of the twentieth century, and panic concerning its spread was comparable to that of the miasma—an implication that in the 1980s, those who suffered from AIDS lived abnormal sexual lifestyles that led to their infection.

Scour the newspapers of regional American newspapers today and you will find somewhere, letters from readers or articles regarding the threat that homosexuals poses to the institution of marriage and to sexual norms. The high profile of homosexuality in both the popular and academic press suggests that like the cultural climate of the nineteenth century, our modern time is one that still possesses a cultural fascination with the definition, manifestation, and control of deviant sexuality. It is important that we study the discourses and methods taken to regulate prostitution in order to gain a clear perspective of our treatment of homosexuals—men and woman who are denied the right to marry because they are outside the conventions of normal sexuality. Since the media has such an immense impact on how gays are viewed, it is critical that we look at these stereotypes and understand the various messages they send

What distinguishes discourses on sexuality in the twenty-first century however, is the new forms it has taken. The twenty-first century is one that is marked by the dominance of technologies of communication that did not exist for Victorians.¹⁸¹ The most prevalent form of authoritative discourse in our society has a new countenance---it is not found amid the pages of books or journals but on the television screen. It is from newscasters and Internet websites where we find our information. Reporters such as Peter Jennings and Dan Rather serve as the Henry Mayhews and Parent-Duchâtelets of our day. And like these social investigators, such reporters claim to present the truth and communicate accurate data to their audience rather than biased accounts. From social media websites, reading devices such as Kindles, to iPads—information in today’s world is transmitted in an entirely new way that raises questions regarding its influence and the mechanisms which govern its employment.

¹⁸¹ In my consideration of the twenty-first century, I refer to developed Western nations such as the United States and the countries of Western Europe where most people own televisions and computers

Does information conveyed through these technologies constitute a body of knowledge that can be understood from a Foucaultian perspective? Do they exercise power over marginalized populations and if so, how does this power function as a form of social control? I would argue that given the dominance of television networks and the control they have over the dissemination of information, these mediums have even greater potential to affect the way in which audiences interpret their content. Each medium for the dissemination of information can affect the interpretation of information in a different way that is dependent on the perceived veracity of its source. In a century whose populations increasingly rely on these new forms of media, an analysis of how they exercise power and affect public opinion carries important significations for our future.

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